

STEVEN FRATTALI

COLLECTED POEMS

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***PERSON PLACE AND WORLD: A LATE MODERN
READING OF FROST'S POETRY***

***HYPODERMIC LIGHT: THE POETRY OF PHILP
LAMANTIA AND THE QUESTION OF SURREALISM***

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Collected Poems, 1985-2015 Volume Two

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FOR CELAN

Canto

Night-long, light-madness
Silently whispers the dark,
The darkness of tangled,
The falling and falling of
Tangled light-terror.

Secrecies speak
The cold steel of night
From horizon's edge to horizon –
Where speechless compulsion is,
Held in the shattering
Motionless light, wordless,
Aberrant,
Captured but fleeing,
Recaptured forgotten.

In confusion,
In sickness of dreams,
In waking, in sleep,

He speaks his eternal No
To the world.
It echoes, impressed
Upon silence –

Within the cracked crystal
Of light-space,
Beyond the last blood stain of thought.

[Corroded, etched away...]

Corroded, etched away from
the radiant wind of your language
the colorful talk
of the almost-known -- the hundred-
tongued me-my
poem-lie, the no-poem.

Whirled
clear,
free
the path through the snow
human-shaped,
the penitents' snow, to
hospitable
glacier living rooms, tables.

Deep
in the crack of time,
in the honey-combed ice
it waits, a breath-crystal,
your irrevocable
witness.

[To stand in the shadow...]

To stand in the shadow
of the wound in the air.

To stand for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you
alone.

With all that there's room for in that,
even without
speech.

[Hollow life-dwelling...]

Hollow life-dwelling. In the breeze-way
the blown-
empty lung
blooms. A handfull
of sleep kernels
blows from the true-
stammered-mouth and
out to the snow-
conversations.

[Threadsun...]

Thread-suns
over the gray-black barrenness.
A tree-
height thought
reaches the pitch of light: there are
still more songs to sing beyond
humans.

[Words thrown up...]

Words thrown up, volcanic,
over-roared by the sea.

Above,
the surging mob
of the anti-creations: it
flew its flags – image and copy
idly cross into time.

Till outward you send
the word-moon, from which
miraculous ebb-tide comes,
and the heart-
shaped craters
lie naked for the beginnings,
the birth of kings.

[One Time...]

One time
There I heard him,
There, he was washing the world,
Unseen, night-long,
And real.

One and Unending,
Annihilated,
Were as though "I."

Light was. Redemption.

Corona

The autumn eats its leaf from my hand: we are friends.
We shell time from the nuts and we teach it to go:
Time then returns to the shell.

In the mirror is Sunday,
In dream there is sleeping,
The mouth speaks the truth.

My eye glances down to the sex of the loved one:
We look at each other,
We speak our words darkly,
We love one another like poppy and memory,
We sleep like the wine in the sea shells,
Like the sea in the blood-streamings of the moon.

We stand at the window embracing, they look up to us from
the street:

It is time that they knew.
It is time that the stone consented to blossom,
That the unrest beat like a heart.
It is time it were time.

It is time.

Snow-bed

Eyes, world-blind, and in the death-fissure: I come,
The hard growth in my heart.
I come.

Moon-mirror rock-face. Straight down.
(A shining breath-flecked. Streaks of blood.
Vaporing soul, once again nearly form.
Ten-finger shadow – clamped in.)

Eyes world-blind, and
Eyes in the death-fissure,
Eyes eyes:

The bed of snow under us both, the snow-bed.
Crystal on crystal,
Interlocking time-deep -- we're falling,
We're falling we lie there we're falling

And falling:
We were. Yet we are.
We are one flesh with the night.
In the passages, passages.

[Light falls every evening...]

Light falls every evening
Beneath the earth's edge:
Black hills in the red middle-distance
Open and rise up higher –

Like the edge of a crater against the sun.

The bare trees are gray and dark brown.
Sunset turns them heather and rose;
And the light, finally, alters beyond
The charred, crumbling hills,

Their edges red-brown in the last illumination.

Light falls every evening
Past the drop-off horizon,
The earth's rim that widens
Like the eye's pupil in darkness,

Like the rings of a tree.

I see light's last glitter
In the held cup of the pond;
I feel it far beneath the trees' roots,
I smell it in the half-rotted leaves.

I hear it far beyond the earth's edge,
The earth-limit.

[So many constellations...]

So many constellations,
Held out to us. I was,
When I saw you – when was it? –
Outside near
The other worlds.

O these many ways, galactic,
These hours, that poised
The nights over us, weighed them
Into the burden of our names. And it is,
I know now, not true
That we once lived, only
A breath passed blindly between
There and Not There and Sometimes,
As comet-like our eyes darted
To the extinguished, in the chasms;
There, where it burnt out, stood,
Splendid with its many nipples, Time,
On which there already grew, upward
And downward and away,
What is or what was or will be,--

I know,
I know and you know, we both knew,
We did not know, for we
Were there – yes – and not there,
And sometimes, when
Only the Nothing stood between, we found
Our way then to each other.

With Letter and Clock

W_{ax}

To seal the unwritten,
That deciphered
Your name,
That enciphers
Your name.

Will you come now, swimming light?

Fingers, waxen as well,
Through strange
And through painful rings drawn.
The fingertips melted away.

Do you come, swimming light?

Time-empty the hives of the clock
Bride-like the swarming thousands,
Ready to journey.

Come, swimming light.

Ritual

I Ritual

You in the dying
Who yet have not
Died

And still shall not perish

Come,
Come now round my candle.

Bright choirs near me!
Bright choirs of light
Round the tremorous flame –
Real, unreal.

Time is a coal I hold in my hand.

Arrivals.
Departures.
Arrivals.

You held the coal in your hand,
Many hands.
And the ashes
Sift
Downward and down.

Auschwitz
Treblinka
Sobibor

II A Wall With Prisoners' Names Scratched In

Your agony present, not present;
Absent, yet seen.
Seen in the cement of this wall,
In the gashes, the pockmarks and gouges,
The scratchings and scrapings,
In the dust flaking down.
This wall that is you.

Now you are part of the wall,
A wall not of gold
Not mosaic
Not fire, not eternal.
Yet present, now, visibly real.

Cambodia
Laos
Viet Nam

III The Candle

The candle flame is
A tear drop of fire,
A harsh center of light
The lens shies away from,
The camera, the eye.

Lebanon
Salvador
Soweto

IV Night

Bright choirs around me,
Hover near me!
Speak.

And still in the waiting
There's nothing.

The candle blown out is
A dim vertical shape,
A small post, a stake,
Or a chimney.

A twisting gray film of smoke
Hangs in the room.

Homecoming

Snowfall, thicker and thicker,
Dove-colored, like yesterday,
As though even now you still slept.

White piled into distance,
There above, endless,
The sleigh track of the lost.

There below, hidden,
Pressing upward,
What so hurts the eyes,
Hill upon hill,
And invisible.

On each, drawn
Home into its Today,
An I slipped away into silence:
Wooden, a post.

There: a feeling
Blown across by the ice wind
Making fast its dove-colored
Snow-colored cloth-flag.

Freedom

Black fire we have it at morning the smell of it first thing
and we have it at evening
We have it at midday at morning we have it at night
We hear it come down on us from above from the scream
in the air from the opening ripped in the sky
We have to dig so many graves for it for the fire that comes
from the air that pours down on our graves in the
earth the burnt skin and the smell of the air the
whole world is burning

Men come from the forest they come with their heavy
equipment they have blond hair and smiles
Their music is loud they have rifles and helmets and smiles
they swear and they shout they shout to the women
They shout to each other as the sky burns away the golden
hair of the visitors
He shouts we come out of our huts and the sky is a river of
fire at morning the sun full of fire is a fish's crushed
eye full of blood
He shouts and he whistles his radio crackles his music is
full of bright steel as he smiles he laughs they all
laugh
He shouts for his gook for his fish head bastard to come out
he wants him to dig in the mud
He shouts for us hurry the fuck up come on

Black fire of the furnace we see it we smell it at night
We smell it we taste it at morning first thing and the air is
like ash we taste the smell of burnt skin
We smell it and taste it

The man comes and all of them shout at the huts they come
with their music and the women have to do what
they say

The air is like ash the smell of burnt skin and the air is a
grave like the ditch near the river

He calls out hey fucker get the fuck over here do what we
tell you get it ha

He shouts get your ass over there fish head fuck face get
your ass you fuck get over how did this get here
where did this come from fuck you

Spread her legs wider he says she screams more but he says
it again fucking bitch fish head give it to her now
where did this come from ha fuck face she's
screaming there's one then another another another
another she's quiet ha now where did this come
from answer

He smiles and smiles he laughs and his music is metal is
bright full of knives he thumbs open his holster
He swings the gun round and round in the sun the sky is a
blood yolk the river is burning he wants us to dig in
the mud

Black fire of the furnace we taste it the burnt skin of
daybreak the raw hanging skin of mid-day the black
stumps of evening

We taste it at evening we taste it and taste it

He comes with his helmet his gold hair and smile my
mother is ash and my father my sister my daughter
he smiles with his music he laughs

He calls for his fuck head piss face you piss yellow you
know that you fuck get your piss head down there
and keep it there

He asks us to dance and to sing to his music bright music
bright steel

And we sing floating up toward the sky and the sun is a
blood yolk we drift and we dance in a circle our feet
brush the earth our leg stumps
Black fire of the furnace we smell it and taste it the burnt
skin of daybreak we taste it at mid-day death comes
he's a big man from Washington

The charred stumps at evening skin graft we taste it with
screaming with screaming with screaming
And death is a big man from Washington his bomb sight is
perfect his eye is steel blue
He takes out the target precisely big tuna this is river
scratch gook land do you copy copy river scratch
gook land out
He comes with his smile his gold hair and bright music and
his hands are fish blood and fish guts and skin graft
like a burst fish's bladder
He shouts for my wife for my sister he shouts and he smiles
his music is laughing we go toward our grave in the
sky in the river

He swings his hand round in the sun around and round and
round he raises it straight up and death is a big man
from Washington

He comes with his smile and gold hair
He comes and the world turns to ashes

[Ores are laid bare, the crystals...]

Ores are laid bare, the crystals,
the
the unwritten, hardened
into speech, lays
open a sky.

(Thrown up, to the day,
Over there, that's
How we lie.

Door you before once, table
With the murdered
Chalk star on it:

Which
A – reading ? – eye now has.)

Ways going there
Wood-hour
Along the sputtering wheel track.
Out-
Read
Small, clattering
Beach nuts: blackened
Open, by
Finger-thoughts questioned
About –

About what ?

About
The unrepeatable, about
It, about
All.

Sputtering ways going there.

Something, which can go, greetless
As the thing become heart,
Comes.

[The bright...]

The bright
stones pass through the air, the bright
white, the light
bringers.

They will
Never go down, never fall,
Never strike. See rise
Up,
Like the narrow hedge roses, they turn themselves out,
Floating toward you
You my quiet
You my truth –

I see you, you pluck them with my new
With my
Everyman's hands, throw them into the bright once more
That no one needs to cry or to name

Memorial

In the enthrallment of roots
And then up through
The yew and the oak,
In the dead,
In the dark,
In the torrent and stillness returning
And turning,
The drawing ones tore you and took you –
Driven, driven....

But always in you
From the first, the other
World origin dipping down
Through the well, beheld-not-beheld
And heard as well-emptiness,
The echo was there –
Seminal privacy, secrecy,
Again and again.

Then,
At some point (but when?)
On the black shard of radiance
You climbed into day.

[It is no more...]

It is no more
This
Heaviness
Descended with you at times
Into the hour. It is
Another.

It is the weight that holds back the emptiness,
That would
Go along with you.
It has, as you have, no name. Perhaps
You two are the same. And perhaps
You, too, will call me that
Sometime.

[The trumpets' sounding...]

The trumpets' sounding
Deep in the glowing
Page-blank,
At torch height,
In the time-hole:

Hear yourself in
With the mouth.

Te Deum

Because You do not exist
You must
Be written about,
Because You exist as a word
You must be written, rewritten, unwritten,
Written and read as word,
Intoned as an act
Among the unknown knowers, unknown –
A sound in the air,
A vibratory absence somewhere in the throat
And heard somewhere,
Perhaps in the mind –
And if not now, then one day,
And if not then, then one day:

A word,
In self-perplexed certainty spoken,
In clear uncertainty heard.

Ashes

At times

Time is the thought-stream of space
Its movement life
Music's consummation with silence
Light possessing every instant
Extension duration
The explosion of light
Opening darkness

But light
And the light of my mind
Borne on a breath
In the opening occurrence of being and time
Are balanced
Borne upon time
But lost time

So light is the merest whisper in darkness
Suffocation is inside each breath
The world is the ashes of light

Ash Wednesday

I

Late February,
And the snow is like ash.

The world beneath is a coal.
Like the ice I hold in my hand;
My hand aches
As the ice melts out of my grasp.

Graphite or lamp black –
This on your forehead,
This that you carry with you
And are.

Time is flaking
Like paint from the walls,
Like the light
From the side of the hill –

Powder blue dusk on snow.
Pewter shadow of tree line.
The still white sun
Is nearing the hill now,

And the world, for an instant,
Does not tremble,
Does not stop.

II

Now

(And what is it?)

Time flaking away
Like ash
That falls in a sifting crumble
From the black and infra-red log,

Time flakes away
Like ash from my skin.

Time is the white dust
You blow from the coals.

Time is flaking away,
Time the hour glass ash,
As the space of the world,
The air that we move through,

Darkens around the red sunset-coal.

[In the fading light of the world...]

In the fading light of the world

Sun strikes aslant
The macadam. Glare-puddles.

Small stones in the road
Have shadows – each one

An ink stain
In the iodine light.

Indigo
Of tattered after-storm.

Flakes
Of soaked bandages rotting.

Horizon of ash-crust –
Dark purple, black – like a scab.

Through low trees
Sun spurts bright blood.

Then in the very last light,
Against the horizon

A charred hill.

A Hill

Up ahead

In blood copper,
Against the sun going down

The telephone poles
Are three crosses.

Burnt in the gold,
In red fire,

In illusory fire,
On a single hill.

They stand – three sticks,
Splintered and charred.

Ash-flake of moth wing
In the periphery of night.

Black wires
Lead talking to talking

As silently as thought.

The air is crowded with unheard speech.

Night Watch

Far in the night an open eye
Behind the unlit pane,
Where eye and mind
And the enclosing room
Swim and become
One
Within the darkness of earth-night
And night sky,
Expands to hold the snow-lit fields beneath,
The hills beyond, the pelt-like wood,
The intermittent wind
Within itself, within
Its steadiness,
Its wide,
Pried-open and night-frozen gaze.

A mobile point
Of reflection
Quivering like a bead
Of mercury
Looks out, around,
While all around
Outside
Stray sounds of dog bark,
Branch crack, ice fall,
Freeze silent in the steel-like air.
The winter constellations fall around.
Embers and silence.
Listening.
There's nothing harder than North Country ground
Snow-covered and

Snow-covered.
The winter night cannot be held
Or steadied or contained.
It cannot be
Moved out of
Or moved into.
The eye can only see
Yet cannot see enough.

Tell me the things,
The many and few things,
That happen now as I,
Who am the eye
And not the eye,
Swim and waver in the night
As I stand here on this wooden floor,
The faint drafts moving all around me
As I strain my ear and eye
To catch
The remnants of the few last things that are,
Things that we are
And must be
And must not.

Somewhere
Someone
Is opening a door
And closing it behind him
One last time, and
Somewhere someone
Is chasing the wild horses
Through the hour glass of falling sand
Alone
And through the minute seas of burning sand,
And somewhere someone
Dies alone

Or lives alone
And yet still dies.
Speech
Accumulates like falling snow,
And lies on top of lies
Are continent-abrading glacier ice.

How can I give myself
The power to continue?
Nothing can help me,
And there is no help,
Nothing within and nothing, too, without –
Sovereign of darkness, of the winter sky
And of the earthly night,
You who are nothing and nowhere
And cannot hear.

Clearings

I

This, of all good the most dangerous –
The given speech of men,
That they make of it what they will

Yet how much has been suffered,
And for the un-mortal –

Sunlight
On the luminous clouds' processional
So slow through the afternoon's radiant peace

For lightning, for rain and storming wind,
And for the stillness after

For the unmortal,
Unapparent yet palpably clear

For the sky, for the heavens,
For the sun and the earth

For all these so much has been suffered and named
For we are a holding of speech,
A continuing, listening, watching –

For that which appears and does not,
For the changing in the abiding

As in a field at daybreak
When the sun
In its opening power and terror
Breaks upward on the horizon

The darkness is split with a first ray
And then slowly fades

The present consents to take light
The field's luminous presence
Rises from the dark

Beginning is the circle of the opening world
Sparkling with light on wet grass

II

What is there – here, now –
In the intention of these powers
To destroy the world?

We look up from the well
Into which we have fallen
And see the night that cliff-like rises
Black and straight,
The walls are echoing
And echoing with words,
We are deafened by our words

And above them there are stars

Reach up your hand!
Lift up your voice!

Let your hand fall back down

The last voices, too, grow silent
But for the faintest whispers

III

You have been weighed
In this balance, Now
In the leaf-time of the year,
Leaves float down to touch
The pond water's
Mirror-face
As their counterparts float up

You have been weighed in this balance

How much does a leaf weigh,
Or its reflection?

Autumn sunlight

Deep autumn light, light deeply echoing
As though from somewhere else,
Farther than the sun,
Farther than the earth
In sudden silence every falling leaf
Is still
And every rising leaf

The earth
Is a leaf that rises
Toward its falling counterpart,
Floating upward through
Depths of luminous reflections –

Our generation
Standing by,
Hanging upside down into the pond

AFTER THE SNOW

After The Snow

The snow fell through the night, night-long,
The deepest snowfall of the year.
By dawn it covered everything,
Pearl gray unfolding everywhere
As light leaked inward from beyond
Through curtained distances of gauze.
Since there was hardly any wind
Snow-feathers fell straight down in bars,
White, crystalline, and beautiful.
Both beautiful and delicate,
They held the world completely still;
No one was out or ventured out.
At first no prints or tire tracks
Marked here from there; then gradually
The storm died down to drifting flakes,
Some shovelers came out to see
The sky, directionless and gray,
The small sun floating in deep mist,
Diminished, vague, and far away,
The world laid bare and slightly lost.

A Place

First wash of dawn light
Over red-tinted earth.
Now the world is still,
As though trapped in amber.

Chimneys and bright metal rooftops
Are flooded with insubstantial gold.
It shines at their edges,
A river around small islands.

O sun in your great circle,
Where do you come from and go?
We stand here watching, tiny,
Dark, at the outermost edge.

An Apple Tree

Now in spring sunlight the apple tree
Is bright with white and opal blossoms.
Rough boughs are pewter and wet charcoal,
Knobbed and knuckled, thorned, segmented.

And the apple tree is like a web.
It glistens catching the sun's light,
Holding it in a seen pattern
As airily gaping as it is precise.

Canes and ridges of extruded ash,
Small trunk and branches, this tough life,
Combine with light and numbered
Pattern, motion, stillness, delicate color...

Designs of beauty: the entire tree
Letting us see it, and see all,
Bearing vision, letting our seeing live,
Bearing white blossoms, letting its fruit fall.

Arista

The beard of ripened wheat

Arista
awn

The bristle of the grain

And the wheat is shaken from the husks by wind

By wood
by threshing
by my hand

By wind
by our hands

By wind
by water
and by fire

And the wheat
the ripened kernel
the grain's heart

Left in my open palm

Falls to the threshing floor

The wheat dust blown away

Awn
arista
everything

Held for a moment
in a sieve of light

Astronomical Twilight

The air is absolutely clear, and cold,
The sky at early evening a deep blue,
Brown smoke is rising straight up from a flue.
The hills are turning black and the light gold.
And then a star is bright above the green
And yellow ember glow, still burning there
Where chimney smoke is smudged on darkening air
And opposite the rising crescent moon.
I see the glimmering fields spread out beneath
The constellations of the winter sky
Which astronomical twilight brings up high
And clear, and see the faint smoke of my breath.
The earth is darkening and freezing. Light
Is nearly all reflection, now that it's nearly night.

The Beggar

Cold breath smoke.
Sun crack at the hill's edge.
And my two feet are frozen.

I wish I could open
The sun's door
So much wider.

Mid-day.
I raise my arms
Toward the sky,
Nothing now in my hands
But light.

Evening.
O shadow,
How far you reach!

In the Bower

I

Shrill wind outside, below zero wind-chill.
But here there's a space heater going:
Electric coils burning orange
In the dark room. Brown twilight. Long silences.
Hot metal ticks now and then.
The reading lamp spills pale ginger ale light
On your page, on your hand.

II

Closing my eyes
I see your face
Opening my eyes
I see your shoulder your hair

Closing my eyes
On your hair
Opening my eyes
To find your face

III

On the edge of sleep.
Rushing syllables crying in the wind outside.
But smiling, with one thought,
I draw you back.

Empty Books

We can't hold the falling leaves
In our four hands.
I try to capture them, absurdly
Hugging piles to myself.
They only fall right through
The hoop of my two arms.

They fall away from me
Like tatters,
Like stray papers blown about.
The two of us stoop after them
But only knock our heads.

I've read of all the figures
In the antique books,
Great heroes, ancient wars
And lots of them.

Some men are made for fighting,
Some for nothing in particular.
And even the fighters have their day.
But I have read the dark words
Written in the ancient texts.

The last page is a blank,
But it isn't for your notes.
This is the note you need instead,
An empty page for all the empty books.

An Empty Hand

I Karate Dojo, Early Morning

Open the wooden door
That clicks shut behind you.
Bare footsteps echo.

Morning light
Across floorboards.
Greatest of masters.

II Forms Practice

Training at early morning.
Our shadows so huge
In slanted light.

III To My Sparring Partners

Karate is
Motion plus emotion,
The master said.
For you, brothers,
May the path be endless.

Flowering Cherry at Night

Shadow

Leaves flutter and shiver
In the moonlit wall,
Whitewash and green moonlight,
And the black lilacs rustle and stir
In the awakening chill night.
Wind blows, and the shadow of wind,
Petal on petal is falling now,
Flaking from the shadow bough.
The April moon is on the dusty grass.
The cherry tree is wet with moonlight
And night dew.

The cold dew shines,
The spider thread and spittle of moonshine
Webbing the tree; and the others come out
From where they had hidden
So deep in the night,
From the tree's depth of shadow,
Their voices in silence
And footsteps now walking the unbroken dew,
Fallen petals like snow still untouched.

The world that we know
Is only the thinnest crust.
Dew is cold to the touch
In the dark wet grass.

Soon more rain
Will come and the blossoms will melt like snow,
Will fall to the grass
As the snow did itself only a short time ago.
Voices in silence, their footsteps weightless in moonlight.
And the great circle glitters like dust.
Yet I cannot repeat
What has happened again and again.
The April moon is on the dark spring grass.

Great Oak at Evening

It is late summer

The dusty-lighted sunset of summer evening

The burning and half-charred tree line
 black rooftops of houses,
 and the steeple corroded in glare
Towering cumuli of pink and copper and yellow orange

Along the naked edge of the earth
 now turned just a crack
The powers have entered –
 sudden annunciations,
Blind spots, beaming spotlights through the leaves

Great arms of the oak tree
 cross-beamed with deepening light,
 the late, the quiet and haunted light,
 gnat-clouded, gold

Smolder of light bars shining through and through
 the back-lit tree is a honeycomb of the sunset
 and the green crown is rippling, light-shadowed

Weightless
 substanceless
 matter

Futureless
 pastless
 time

Later Stanzas

I

How many grains of rice
In my steaming bowl of soup?
There must be a number.

II

Evening recedes. Ebb-tide of light
From the beach of the world.
Sand bars of golden cloud.

III

I wake in the night.
In the dark I see tall shapes
Standing. Gift bringers!

Movie Going

With what fondness we remember
Our first movie going. In memory
I observe that scene and think, When was it?
Was I there? Although I remember the father –

A dark authorial presence
Somewhere behind and to one side,
Like an impresario in the wings.
Sometimes a moving shadow: heavy mandible of forearm,

Or, suddenly, a rippled looming head,
Or a shadow's tilted eminence, impending,
Along the gray periphery
Of the living room's dim ceiling –

A technical adjustment – one slide
Then quickly, unceremoniously removed
To a sound like automatic doors,
A clicking open and clicking shut,

Emergency room doors
Or a counter of some kind – or a knife being sharpened? –
And then a sudden blank,
All white and glaring hotly.

But restoration followed: blue sky again,
And trees, a car, some children and adults
Standing beside it, smiling,
Waving in the clear spring day, immobile.

The images are different now.
Alien and curious, just as though I were
A visitor from somewhere else, from somewhere
In the wings, I went the other night.

It was a box traversed,
Divided by a beam of light.
In the beam a steady seepage of bright dust
Was falling and falling, turning ceaselessly.

Light particles, I thought. But then it seemed
That they were really strings
And dusty cords
Woven into cables of blue light

Now pulling absolutely taut
From the weight of the enormous images
Which filled the screen,
Itself the size of two billboards.

I thought then of an elevator car
Seen from outside and high above
As it hurtles down and down
And down an endless elevator shaft,

Falling terrifyingly fast,
And the cables were a spider's filaments
Stretched out so fine and far
And barely holding on.

The millstone of the weightless images
Dropped like a bank safe
Through this bright cobweb,
Leaving the projector's lens a world behind.

And then I thought perhaps
The screen, the imaged wall,
The roof of the falling car
Was just the square base of an hourglass

Whose unseen globe or bulb –
Immaterial, conceptual, mathematical –
Expanded about us in the dark room,
Expanded outward to infinity.

The particles of light
Were the hour glass's sands
Pouring down and pouring over us,
A pyramid or cone of light

Expanding, mounting higher, higher
And beyond the dark walls of the theatre,
Filling the whole world
With bits and crumbs of radiance,

Like particles of broken glass,
Like the mirror surfaces of banks,
Like neon in the downtown street,
Like shattered glass along the sidewalk

Where I walked home later on that night.

This Is Not a Poem

Far in the south
A little girl – brown skin,
Mud in her hair,
A kind of sack for a dress,
No shoes –
Walks down a muddy road.

Jeep tires have made gutters in the mud
Along one side. Along the other.
Then down the middle in a swooping swerve.

She remembers shouts and screams. Other things.
Then she forgets them again.

Now it's no longer raining, but hot.
Smoke and mist hang drifting
Along the ridge of the bright green hills.

She is walking toward
A muddy yard, two shacks,
And a clothesline with colored rags.
In her whole life
She has never had
Enough to eat.
Will she ever?

Meanwhile north
In the enlightened world
They are talking.
Freedom, they say. Freedom.
Freedom. Freedom. Freedom.

Words and images
Accumulate
Like dust in corners
Or like fallen snow
Or leaves, dead leaves.

Or else
Like playing cards thrown down,
Deployed to make
A tilting tower of cards –
Deep black, and red, deep deep red –
Club and Ace, sharp Diamond
And splendid, laughing Jack,
Teetering higher and higher
Over the game board
Of the world.

A Love Supreme

You come to me
and I am waiting here

My study of silence
in the silent study
Of my room
myself
outside, the summer night

And there is music present
In the time that it makes palpable

Filling it
as water fills a stream bed

As the current fills the water

As water fills the fountain where it rises, falls

And so we become each other
this – the always vanishing
ungraspable, yet touched

You come to me and I am waiting here

By passions our life is bound and by passion it is
released

The Old City

Sometimes you say, I'll leave here,
I'll get totally away,
And in some other place things will turn out well.
How sure of this in some moods,
At some odd moments, one can feel.
It seems so strange to say,

Yet there it is. You actually
Do feel this way.
The absolute purity of the bright blue sky –
So deep, so empty, and so clear,
Even where the city blocks it off with some old building –
Must play a role in this, that mood of longing
For departure, confident, however strangely,
Of renewal or, even more unlikely,
Of triumph in return.

Then,
Everything, you feel,
Is wrong and fated somehow to remain that way.
Your heart, your dead heart,
Seems sunken six feet in its grave – discouragement,
Disappointment, loneliness and boredom,
Bury it and keep it there.
How long can this go on, you say.
Everything here is dead, is ruined.
The years I've spent here
Seem absolutely wasted.
This is the mood that feeds your longing
To leave for anywhere – somewhere –
Just to get away.
You know it won't work, though.

You won't find anything that's better there,
Wherever that might be. There isn't
Any promised land. The place you've lived in,
Which memory has taken up and duplicated
In its own discerning subtle ways,
So devious, encompassing, so timeless and time-drenched,
Will always stay with you –
The old and fateful city
That by now you've learned by heart,
That is your heart, your life itself, in some mysterious way.

You'll walk the same streets,
Sit in the same squares
Where evening stretches out its shadows,
Where dusty light is slanted, tinted copper-red,
So deeply haunted with the past
It fills your heart to overflowing
In so many ways you can't express,
Both good and bad.

You'll walk the same streets,
Visit the same old neighborhoods,
Getting older every day, both you and they.
This is your fated place
You'll gradually begin to see. This city,
Never chosen, which was choosing you
Even as you thought to get away,
Is where you'll always be.
The failures and discouragements,
The loneliness, the boredom, perhaps some few
good things,
Are with you everywhere,
No matter if it's there – but where? – or here.

Reverdie

The spring's warm weather blows into my heart,
Opening pages as it agitates the leaves
(That show their countless eyes, their countless mouths
Whispering secrets in the rained-on tree).

New movement crowds the pages of my book.
I raise my hand (that now seems strange to me)
Feeling the light upon the back of it.
The light is rich this afternoon, and warm,

Haunted with infinite depth, and yet still clear,
Empty perhaps, yet radiant, streaming glare
Through cracking fissures of the maple's crown –

Openings from one book into another book,
Misstatements of beginning, where one ray
Pierces the side of one page through to the other side.

In Early Spring

You've risen from the bath – the water's beads
And rivulets still streaming, glistening.
Your skin is flushed a pale rose. Your skin is wet,
And, at the precise point where my lips touch it,

Feels almost cool, although that cannot be.
I back away and you retreat as well –
Your waiting towels and the clouds of steam
The fogged and streaming mirror is as blank

As ice – eluded, and the mauve-blue water
In the porcelain tub still steams like tea.
Your element is water, yet the bright light,

Cold, flaring on the wooden blinds, unclosed
Somehow or other, displays you clear –
Your wet, fair skin, goose-bumped, beautiful.

Later Spring

So to come back again – to where those times
I saw the rain fall through the maple's leaves,
The swirls of light up through the twisting boughs
As I cranked my neck and spun myself around,

Drops falling down into my open mouth,
The wind that tossed the boughs so clear and cold;
Always these cool wet days in later spring
Days of bright drenchings, active windy days

When everyone is shivering yet laughing
In the cold and breezy wet, tall waves of light
Looming like curtains the bright clouds flow through.

The children coming home from school at last
Are laughing too, they're out for quite a while.
And in the sharp clear nights the moon shines down.

Paraclete

You are the thing most needed, spirit-like.
And visiting the mind at intervals
And visiting the heart more rarely still,
You bring this light, peculiar, or a wind

Like light: as much illumination in the breath
Blown from your void, your darkness and abyss
Within, as in an overt clarity.
However clear and calm the moment's joy

Or however powerful, uncontrollable
The chaos of the short-lived mood, you are
The thing most needed, most invoked;

Your coming not a thought and not a breath,
Nor anything requested, nor hoped for,
But unforeseen empowerment and grace.

Breath of Cold

The window breathes in the January air,
Colder than any yet. Though open
Just a crack, the wandering occasional
Desire that it brings in every icy breath

Is suddenly aspiration and new warmth
Brightening like a flame in a stream of air.
Realities – myself, the room – are sharpened now
As every moment freezes, burns the last

Of what is dull, numbed and repetitive.
The shock is brief, electric – nearly pain
Kindling a temporal ecstasy and renewal

Which breaks the window's cool transparent skin
And draws one out into the unframed night,
Cold, dark, and starred with possibilities.

Walking through the Dark

Passages always waiting for my step –
Gateways through the overhanging leaflets
Of October's midnight trees: green moonlight
And zebra shadow-grillwork darkness.

I walk from frame to frame – each sidewalk crack,
And sense the interstices of the film
(Which all flash by so infinitely fast)
Must hold the deep reality one feels

In glimpses of sudden clarity, or dreams.
Yet how can you approach it, here and now?
Where shadow-doors from shadow-scrimmed tree boughs

Are woven things, textiles of light and dark,
To touch perhaps, yet not to press beyond,
And so much more like things to be tangled in.

Passageway

The deep and gold October light
That filled our two high windows
In the later afternoon –
That's what I remember. Even now I still
Can see it as it falls across
Your face in profile
When you glance down at your papers,
And then back up at me.
And the red flowers on your desk – roses or carnations –
Seemed to be crying out
In their own radiant
And silent world of light,
Ecstatically.
The two of us were sitting there
In a kind of haze,
A cubicle of honeycombed and slanting sun
Which streamed in through the two high, dusty panes.
It was our first real talk alone,
There in the office, in that high brick building
Which overlooks the busy street. Always
It seems it's somewhere filled with light –
Near doors and thresholds
Or bright windows of some kind –
That I remember you, and 'remember'
Isn't really the right word,
Since it suggests the past, and rather
What I feel is more a present thing, your luminous
continuing
Presence in my life. Where are we going, the two
Of us, and through
What doors or passageways?
It's true that we can't always say.

Still there is the single chain of moments
Radiant in my memory,
Still there are the flowers in their vase,
Still two voices in the sunlit room.

Past Sleep

I

Going to bed. Already thinking
Of what I'll be doing tomorrow.
Crowded-together days. Dim joy.

II

Light switch. And the bedside lamp
Fades into black. Nothing.
O the vastness of nothing!
And slowly there are four walls.

III

Morning. And I rise,
The small room
Enormous with sunlight.

IV

And the sun is in me
Somewhere, like a candle flame
Inside a candle.

V

Thinking past sleep
Into morning.

A Reading Lamp

A cylinder of metal – a trumpet
Of some kind, though a silent one.

Within: a bulb of light,
My flower of light
Whose stem drinks dark electric roots.

Here a stream of radiant dust
Is pouring
From the always dry canteen.

What would night be without you?
Dropping your circle of light, a theatre
Where my hand has blindly strayed,

My hand which now, at the bidding of my eyes,
Will put you out.

Ring Around

We stand in your bedroom
In the light
Of this bright afternoon.

It's autumn and a cold breeze
Is blowing through the white curtains.

My two hands
Are grasping your hands,
And our arms
Are two parallel lines.
Where can they ever meet?
And yet they can never end.

It's autumn and a cold breeze
Is blowing through the white curtains.

Gold light through the pane:
Annunciations of silence and dust.
I see it in stripes on my shirt sleeve
And on your green blouse.

The gold light is warm
On my shoulder,
The rich light a-flash
In your hair as we spin.
And you laugh. Yes, you're laughing,
And I'm laughing too.

It's autumn and a cold breeze
Is blowing through the white curtains.

Sleep

I

With an eye in my stomach
What would I dream?

II

Seeing – a stone sunk past the surface.
Breathing – spread of slow ripples on a pond.
Hearing – an echoing well.

III

In sleep, the crowds gathering and gathering,
The press of the others.
In waking – solitude.

IV

Sleeping together, dreaming separately, waking alone.

V

Voices from day,
Sounds from the night,
Dreams out of silence.

VI

Tongue in the mouth
Searching for another mouth,
Fingers of the hand
Searching for another hand.

VII

Drinking sleep
From the cup of night,
A face
From the river of day.

VIII

Breathing – wind in the trees.
Speaking – the clatter of leaves.
The sound of my own voice in dreams,
Tangled root deep in earth.

IX

How many sounds are there in sleep?
The syllables of my name
In the other world?
When?

A Sleeper

Between just-parted drapes –
 two compass legs of light

 This sleeper, in
Idea-drifting slumber, her Platonic bath

The world
Is the weight of her pillow, or less

 I hear
Her barely-audible breathing

Now she gathers her new motivations

 All from herself
From her being, non-being
 From the real, the not real
 from the no-longer-quite

From the air, from light –
 from a body
In quest of itself

The act of her waking
 Is many, not one

Yet still simply her

Sun flares along the edges of the blinds

Snapshot

It's morning and you rise. You shake your hair
And stretch yourself a bit, your elbows high,
Your blue night gown illuminated by
A slant of light that smolders in the air.

I want to keep you here just as you are –
Your smiling face and hair confused just so,
Your two bare feet that step so lightly through
The sun's pathway that cuts across the floor.

The floor is like a sun dial's burning face
Now held completely open to the sun,
No eye to close or gaze to turn away.

The walls mere walls, blinds sieve the streaming day,
Yet day still comes, our burning time burns on.
How beautiful it is! – this time, this place.

Insomnia

I lie awake – the only thing
That's clearly to be seen
Is the clock dial's radium green
Dashes in a spiky star-like ring.

Nothing can be done or said
Until the morning, when the summer sun
Comes like the resurrection of the dead,
A bright bleeding on the horizon.

What are you asking me, strange dial?
How I shall meet the coming day?
For surely it is on its way.
Stop burning, let me think a while.

Thaw

Brown rushes lie almost flat
In the half-frozen swamp

In the early evening
Rain is melting old snow
And gray ice

Three crows settle
In a brown willow tree

Through stiff gray bushes
And through the cat tails
A warm wind blows

Time

Nearing my step into the other realm,
I dimly feel the limits of the world.

How strangely fast the seasons.
Yet all is still.

I feel my past so vaguely,
And as though with just fingertips

Vestigia

In early autumn's gold still warm
Sunshine, each falling leaf –
A moment of the world – caught in this light,
Adrift for seconds in unmoving air,
The red leaf drifting in warm light.

With me the world begins, with me it ends.

Now, after, before –
 Burning the instant never to return.
 What will there be, what be revealed,
 The ash burned down until there's nothing more?

Not seen, not heard,
The moment without substance
Dilates beneath my feet and closes over me.

The Visitor

I try to find the surface of the earth
Yet cannot touch beyond the mirror's glass.
The autumn light reflected in the pond
Is depths of surfaces and shimmerings of depth.

The world is always here, always this place,
And time is always now, only right now.
Yet now is never now and here is everywhere
And nowhere; the world is still unknown.

Where have I been? What is this place where I
Have suffered, wandering in ignorance,
Searching to find the one life briefly glimpsed
In dream, in memory, in hope, in fear?

Meadow Wandering

Windless and silent, mid-afternoon passes,
And I've lost my way
Where in the hot July sun the grass is
As dry nearly as hay.

We've scarcely a thought as we wander, our goal
The meadow and then
Through the dry grass we climb to the knoll
Where we've already been.

And all afternoon in the hot July air
We go wherever we will,
Along the back road and the parched meadow there
To the top of the hill.

Sources

Silent, the hottest hours pass
In the field, and I've lost my way.
Breathing the scent of the tall and never-mown grass
And the heat of the summer's day,

Listen, and you hear the life of noon –
The absence of the breeze.
Stopping here to sit
There is this peace –

The throb of time, the heat –
The summer's things –

Departing –

And my study of silence.

Place your hand against the ground.
Place your ear against the ground.

A Song

These I would give – white trillium and thyme,
These sprays of lilac beaded by the rain
And all the apple blossoms on the grass
Nor want them back again.

All things delicate – flowers from the field
All wild and of a scent – I would bestow,
And though they're not as delicate as you,
Yet I would have it so.

For I can still recall that afternoon,
The quiet heat and stillness without a breeze
In which there was just buzzing of cicadas
And now and then the breeze.

The sun was hot above as there we lay
Amid such peace, the warm and scented air,
Where no one and no thought of time disturbed
Our time together there.

For Claudia, with Flowers

Dear Claudia, I've gathered in the field
The Queen Anne's lace in which you'll find concealed,
If you look closely, one magenta spot
Right at the center, just a tiny dot
In this one, and in that one a little more.
(I can't help wonder what it could be for.)
But each one has a drop of purple dye,
As though dabbed in there just to catch your eye.
What intricate white patterns they create –
A lacy mathematics, and so delicate.
I gathered them this morning on the hill.
Now take them since you too are beautiful.

Waiting for the Afternoon

The long slow hours of this afternoon
As I wait for the moment when the day
Might suddenly be more than life deferred,
More than that waiting absence, future tense,
A moment never to be realized.
Always this pleasure in the warm sunshine
That shines in casually, the morning's gift –
When to be there and breathing is enough,
Is to know life, the fullest depth of life,
This realization of a moment's chance –
The morning sunshine warm upon my hand –
And to want nothing but this moment now,
Just passed already as it is enjoyed,
Its one fulfillment nowhere in this world.

By the Fire

Perhaps I'll leave the page unmarked,
Unwritten, and let absence speak.

And maybe life might find some other way
To write itself – though unwritten, unexpressed –
Cleaving the absence that it bears at heart
With a modest sure perfection.

Sound of the flute in moonlight –
A pure poise, perfect being,
In a moment of pure time.

By this the present comes into itself,
The moment deepening, expanding,
Experienced, yet true
--graceful,
In the art of living's complex fire,
A fire not of passion
And yet burning to the truth of what one is.

What is there here that could exist that way,
Realized and perfect in the moment of its life?
The oak log fire in the fireplace?
Your presence by the hearth, the flames
That fall and flicker, live their lives, depart?
Look at the falling shadows on the wall,
The shadows falling dark upon your hair.
Are we the shadows or the fire, in our burning
We must bear and can hardly bear?

Winter Night Sky

I

Winter storm coming.

Tops of the trees
Rushing in the wind,

Branches of the trees
Swaying in the wind,

Roots of the trees
Waiting for the wind.

II

There. Brightest stars
So small in the cobalt sky.
And there the white
Full moon has risen from a chimney.

III

Angels and archangels
Of amethyst and diamond
Touching a throng of empty trees.

IV

Walking. Cold.
The stars shine so brightly.
My thoughts fill the night.

A Winter Sunset

There are others here, from beyond our world,
From the other one, high presences.
The earth, the stars, and the sky itself are their speech.
Their speech is a silent speech, an inscription;
They are themselves their own speech in its silence.

This evening – here and now – I see
The orange, the gold and green light
Of winter sunset. And the bare hill,
Outlined in embers, red and brown,
Is trembling in the river's shining steel.

Bright opal of the winter moon
Is full and streaming light
Against the noble blue,
And there are tiny points of stars deep in the lake of night.

BLACK SUN

Love I love
But now I am only
Love's echo
I listen and

Hear myself fade
To where I will
No longer be
Heard

The sound
Of your voice
Will be what
I hear in the silence

Yours was the face
I loved
Your eyes were the eyes
Your voice the voice

How to forget them
Now that they're mine
In dark rooms
Exchanges are made

And none comes intact
Through the mirror-realm

Y ou were my death
And my love
The shadow-form
Left to me here

Love's candle
Was placed on my tongue
Love's flame
Was lit in my mouth

Now hot wax
To seal up my eyes
Now only your lingering
Tresses of smoke

L ove's hour I tore
Love's tongue I
Bit off
For a while it babbled

Speaking within me
But now the leaves fall
My leaves whither and fall
I lie here

And wait for my death

In the dim
Amber darkness
Two moths twined
On the same string
Of light

Shivering in the
Updraft of the flame
Around and around
A helix of ascent

Toward the moment
Of blindness
The wax droplets
Of fire

The flash-bulb
Of Now

What can I do for you
My love open
And tell me open
And let me in

These are my hands
These these my eyes
This is my face and this
Is my body only this

What can I do
For you my love when
Nothing suffices
Nothing that I do or am

This candle
In a darkened room
White point the darkness
Slides around

A hand's shadow
On the ceiling edges
Nearer the bright
Region

And then
A pale petal orange
Between the blinds
Of fingers

The dark
Is settling now
With its candle smoke
And silence

Immensity
Illuminates
A square yard
Of blinds

Serrated edges
Of purple
Then brightening slits
Expanding day

And light flows
Through
Like the ocean
Through open gills

Most recessed
Secret place
Moss soft
Damp leaves

Earth scent
And the gills
Dark underfolds
Rain-beads

Rhythm quickening
Deepening,
Spatter
Of ocean spray

Fragrant
Scummed sands
Of an
Exhausted face

Cauterized wounds
Down from which
Blood still flows
Nail on nail

Blood drips down
Diamonds on
White skin, skin
White as playing cards

The deck of the body
Shuffled reshuffled
Row crossing row
Crucifixion arrangement

By holy chance
Gathered dispersed
Dealt and re-dealt
Blow follows blow

The scourging of whips
The cat deals nine hands
The body is a table
Of rules the living game

Slowly my eyes close
On the tedious gestures
For a while the gamble
Will continue without me

Blind my eyes
Now O love
Since you have
Brought me death

Shut my ears
Now O passion
I must hear
Only silence

No longer to see
The rose
Dark in its
Folded light

No longer to hear
The wind outside
No longer to feel
Its touch when it blows

Drawn to the candle
Where my eye was fixed
I can't help but
Wonder what I felt

What was
That moment
Mind and breath
And body my whole self

Gathered to an apex
The flame-point of life
The candle in memory
Momentarily a burning

Momentarily the cone
And corridor
Of a radiance
I think

What
Was it for
Since it happened
Only once

A sun has darkened
In my life somewhere
Like a cataracted eye
Or like an eclipse

I feel the strangeness
Now in the air
There's a terrible outline
Around everything

I am the truth
And I am the life
This somewhere
Was written said

Yet I am falsehood
Now and death
Since it invades
Me and my dream

In day of night
I cannot hear my voice
Though it is speaking
In my own ear

Tear drops of flame
Drop from the eye of wax
The melted pool
Is eyeless blind

In day of night
I cannot see the hand
Making its furrows
Beneath my hair

Is it my voice
I'm hearing
Is it my hand
That's there

Night of day
And what I was
Has descended with
The darkened sun

Into darkness
Greater than night
My eyes have gone
Down into blindness

My bones into
Brokenness down
In the depths
Of me

Soon to go down
Deeper still
There where my hand
Will no longer be

My hand
But another thing
Black sun has brought me
Here to the darkened land

Inside the rose
There is light
Folded and folded
Radiance returning

Upon itself
Darkness and light
Intersecting
And knotted

Fold upon fold
Intricacies
Defeat of the pondering
Eye and heart

Always the petals
Are gathered far deeper
Than they appear to be
Dark reclusive art

Far inside roses
There is all darkness
Light there is folded
Ply upon ply

O gazing
I cannot help but feel
That I would go there
Go there go there

Although I die

The word must come
Out from
The silent place
That which no voice

Can say
It is and says
Silently
In unspoken thought

This is my written life

Somewhere

Clarte Luxe

Calme

L'isle joyeuse

Clarity and Grace

Calm

The Joyous Island

Clarte Luxe

Calme

L'isle joyeuse

Clarity grace

and calm

The joyous isle

Never the real
The actual given name
Rather the counterfeit
Name upon name

Given in dream
My true self
And so reserved
For the night trial

Reserved for
The desolate
Places of the earth
For my travels

Far into
The desert
Identity reality
Known only there

My footsteps
Are walking
The dream dust road
Blue ash of moonlight

Ivory of moon
Burning and full above
O tell me and tell me
Of all the ways of love

How many footsteps
Have walked on the dust road
Twisted the ways of love
Traced in the dust

How many others
Here in the empty place
So pale the hands
Held out before my face

Day within day
Within night
Within night
Layer on layer

Of translucent time
The coats of an onion's
Web-like skin
The woven life

Not easily shed
Not easily seen through
Ply upon ply
Not easily cut through

Tears come at last
You think why
Why must this
Happen why

Where the night wind
Speaks its syllables
I have stood by
To listen

Hearing it speak
Hypnotically
What cannot be spoken
But only heard

Standing nearing
With every step
The invisible edge
Of star-filled skies

I listen closely
Bold and ecstatic
Secretly
Patiently

Trying to say
Each word

Explain to me
O passion the
Darkness held deep
In the white rose's breast

Where my thoughts
Cannot dwell
Lost in the whirlpool
Tumbled in white vertigo

Which my words
Cannot leave
Trapped in a
Silken silence

Where the light darkens
There at the hill's edge
Red below yellow
At the end of day

In me a similar
Threshold opens
Outward and outward
To a dark descent

Emptying toward
Causeless bliss
Heated
The knot of sand

That I am
The sand-nothing
Gathered compact
And dense

Combined with some
Few things
Shards of reflection
Spicules of dream

Heated baked
Until
Totally solid
Now I undo it

If only in mind
And yet there
Sand back to
Sand as though

Stream into stream
Less than pebbles now
Through fingers
Like water unheld

Like fingers
Of bone
That are
Crumbled to chalk bits

White dust
To white dust
At the edge
Of the moon

Thinking
Toward bliss
In the moon's
Tranquil seas

In the street
Before daybreak
There's a voice
Before car sounds

It's a very soft
Woman's voice
A young mother's voice
Calling

Whose name, whose
Is it she keeps saying?
How will they tell her
He no longer exists

As my hand
Raised in the dark
Is held out
In the void

So my voice
Silently
Is raised
In the silence

The moonlight falls
Through the open blinds
And my heart breaks
At the scent of the wind

Blue green moonlight
Casts a tilted
Square on the floor
Shadow-branches

Are veins
In its marble
A portal of light
Mausoleum facade

And the window a door
But where is it
Leading to
Where O where

And I
Say farewell
To the scent of
The night air

As my breath stirs
In the room
There are stars
Falling far beyond

When my eyes
Close in the dark
They pour
Furies of light

But it is far
So infinitely far
Only these
Smallest drops

Will reach us here

In the evening
The shadows
Gather
Around me

But how many
Shadows
Gather
Within

I am
The lord of caves
Here in
My empty room

Here there is
Infinite
Darkness
Space

Here there is
Unmeasured
Waiting
Time

Here there is
A match
And a
Candle lit

O morning
And the day
Is enormous
With sun and
The room so bright

I come to the window
Light
Fills my hands
My face my eyes

The shadow of night
Is cleared
From my brow
I open toward light

Now I see beyond
Darkness and
I feel
Beyond sight

Day comes and is
A fire beyond,
Blind-iris
Is opened slowly

Bars stream in
Dust smolders
In the smoky
Vitreous emptiness

The room's
Huge space

Ornament
And the day
Outside is tensed
With new light

And the room
Is striped
Like a tiger,
Blinds' wavy stripes –

An aquarium fish
In liquid light
Whose eye is searching for
Something to kill

Exultation
Stands
Improbable part
Of death

Light light
Light feeling
Feeling
Impossible to share

Light Glory Light
Of selfhood
Beholding
The world

I go to the window
And bring down
The blinds
Draw-string
Of evening

It entangles
My wrist
Web-thread
As though of an iris
Contracting

Closing around
The dark pupil
And the prey
That I am

I grow dimmer
A small
Spot at the center
Of dimness

The watchers
Are watching always
Always
Preparing

The place for
You
In the
Other realm

Counterpart
World
Unlike this
Unlike this one

Hidden somewhere

How many shadows
Appear in your life
Seas oceans
Of powers circulate

Seas oceans
Of silence
Oceans with voices
Seas of unknown lives

In my palm
There are lines
The creases
The tracings

The shadows of life

Crossings
And etchings
Like the veins
Of dead leaves

Like the tea
On the floor
Of a puddle
Gold-veined leavings

Prefigurations

Many-bandaged the wounds
And yet blood flows
Drips on the paper
Eyes of the moth's wing

Night faring
Moth wings
Of blood drops
Unimaginably pure

Filled with
The blackness
Of holiest
Random night

Of the nectar
Of night's flowers
The moth's
Only food

Yes one day
I will gather
Them all back
To myself

Drink my own
Blood streamings
Chalice on chalice
Drop after drop

Disappearing
Then
Point by point
Into the forest-night

Like the jaguar
Invisible
Wearing both its
And the night's spots

The scent of
Rotting leaves
Impossible
To say

My whole
Heart
Recollection strains
And grieves

O why
Has this
Come to me
My arms my hands

My body
My only face
My memory
Confused faint

Traces of my days

I am infused
With the night
Soaked in it
Up to my

Eye-socket pools
Globular darkness
Lodged in the skull
Four-dimensional

Vortices
For light
Where all of light's
Drawn in

Light hunger
Immeasurable
Where I swallow
Light's semen

So deep down
My eyes' throat
Worlds of light
Insufficient

For these two
Black holes

Alone now
In bed
The late quiet
Of the night

A meditative
Sphere
Or bubble in time
Appearing here

Now along the
Surfaces of space
Itself
A bubble

A geodesic dome
Of surfaces
Percolated
Out along

The roots
And branches
Of an infinitely
Branching tree

Universe on universe
World on world
On world
Time upon time

I listen
Hear
The tiny world
Grow still

And cease
Like a very distant
Small door
Shutting

As in the hour's glass
Whose
Precious, precious
Hoard of golden sand

Is crumbled
Pinch by pinch

Autumn
Wind-light
Blowing gently floating
The gold leaves

Disheveled
Blown-about hair
Of autumn I lie
In the field

The tall trees
Circle leaning inward
Above me
I the hub

And my arms and legs
Spokes and
Leaves flutter down
Onto my brow

Onto my hair
That's mingled with grass
Onto my chest
Onto the heel

Of my palm
A dry leaf stem
Taps
My wrist

Dreaming
My head is a bag full
Of dry leaves
And hay

Warm, warm day
I am soaked
In the sun-warmth
Like a teabag in tea

Yet a leaf
Cool and green
Is placed
On each eye

Leaf on leaf
With their clear
And cool
Beads of rain

Fallen from
Another life

Scent of roses
Yellow roses
Present here
In the mirrored room

In the mirror
Dresser and table
Stand inside their
Pool of moonlight

Silence and
The moonlight's rain
Pours in through
The open window

In the mirrored room's
Reflection late
Somewhere the
Unearthly night

A being
Which does not exist
May yet
Be described

Drawn
In the sand
The crossing
Lines

And then
The dissatisfied hand
Or the wind
Or the sole of a foot

Wipes the slate

In the interval
There
Between figure
And sand

In the gray
Disturbed surface
Of sand grains
An image

Emerges or
Almost emerges

Deep and
Ancestral the book
Of dreams
Pages unreeling

Frame after frame
Blank pages
Of moonstone, light's
Infinite leaves

Matte black
Ultraviolet texts
Of shadow-branches
Turned and turned

I feel someone
Inside of me
Looking and looking
For someone else

Place of no place
Moon-flash through the trees
And tied to my heart
A lung-sack of shadows

Exhaled out
Out and out
To the still silent
Star-pricked night

The road strip of tin
Down through which
My feet move
Has black spots

And splotchings
Of shadows huge
Tattered lace rust spots
There are light-globes in blue leaves

Place of no place
O moon hungry in the trees
I hear your open mouth
Whistling, whistling

And once
I had
Life in the
Palm of my hand

Pressed my
Hand to the ground
And the grass
Left these lines

How long
Will they last there
Forever perhaps
Forever, forever

Drops
Of quicksilver
Lost in the sand
My eyes

My panther
My jaguar
My night-forest lair
Twisted soaked sheets

My radiant
Provocations
My allure
My secrecy and thought

A chart papers and forms

Space
Without space
Time
Time without without

The eye
The tongue
The voice's voices
Have gone down

There in the mine shaft
Of light
Buried far in
In the tangling

Of the eye-forest
Night-gathered
And outside
Where no one steps

There is perhaps
The sound of rain

Not I
Not the I
That I was this
No no more

It is another
Now a
Threshold passed
Now let my light

Darken
Flame flutter to a faint
Last bead
Halfway down the wick

And then
A mere aura
Then let my eyes
Be wax pools

Let the snuffed candle wick
Be my tongue

Far in the other realm
I am there
Almost there though
Trapped here

Where the other
The opaque counterpart
Still walks
Encounters things
Speaks

Remains silent
There the outline
The dry shell
Of my form

Has been hollowed
Translucent like
Isinglass
Paper stiff

Slowly
The ongoing transfer
From here out to there
Silent in secret

All that I have
Is poured out to
The other place
Into the other one

Slowly like anisette
Into a tiny glass

Light beyond light
There I would disappear
Lost in the other place
Beyond hearing or sight

There not the endless
Not perfection
Reunion
Inexpressible bliss

None of these
But the arrow of gold
Of desire of thought
Of intent

Flown beyond any
Thought or the world
Of intentions
Flown beyond even flight

Slag heap
Of the roof tops
Crossed and re-crossed
By the night wind

The surface
Of treetops wavers
An anemone
Beneath the current

Clumped tree mold spores
And yes I came
Up to the roof's porch
To sit looking out

O night night
Night of no nightness
Moon of no moon
Earth of no earth

O the black
Mouth inside me
Marianas Trench
Will not reveal

More knife teeth
And jaw hinges tearing
Savage
And electric

The life
Beneath life
That I am
Yet this too illusion

Do not weep
For me mother
As a jaguar
I exist

As a panther
Of darkness
In the delta
Of the night

As a piranha
Of minute awareness
Precise and savage
In the Amazon of Now

The night's music sings
In the ear of time
Beige moth wings manic
Aurad street lights stand silent

Those inside the house
Are asleep
Those inside the night
Asleep but watching

Three cars
Are parked
Beside the dark
Apartment house

On the third floor
A window opens silently
Striped curtains flutter
There is no screen

A hand and then an arm
There for a second

O Madonna of dream
And desire
Here your
Choking salt tides

Have brought up
Garlands of seaweed
Oily kelp
Like film footage spilled

The paralyzing tiara
And cellophane gauzy
Veils
Of the medusa

O Madonna
Have mercy
I the piranha
The jaguar implore you

The leopard
Forsakes every spot
In his night-realm
The jaguar forsakes

The steel jaws
In his skull
The unseen heard splendor
And terror of his arrival

The piranha
Forsakes his
Bright razors
Dark waters

For you for you
Yes only for you

Deep within
Your darkest riches
Of velvet
Overflow

The damask rose
Deep within
And your perfume
Of myrrh and nostalgia

Of frankincense and musk
Is the unspeakable
Name of the One
I must ponder

Eternally
Here in hell

Woman of
More than flesh
Dark rose of velvet
Black silk

Your black
Syllables,
Your dark
Perfume

With your mouthful
Of blood
With your
Mouth full of semen

You cannot speak
My name
The syllables
Can't escape from your throat

Passages where
Identity cannot be
Dark turnings where truth
Cannot come to light

I remember your
Biting teeth
Crinkled nipples
Your softest, softest skin

I remember
The rose whirlpool
Of your
Swirling tongue

Hilarious elation

And the sadness
Of the garden
Just after
The evening rain

The green wood
My down-going
The route of sand
My home

The green wood
Leads me nowhere
The sand route
Goes through my heart

The routes I might
Have taken wander
All about the
Traces of my footsteps

The routes I
Might have taken
Call to me
From the dark

Mercurochrome
Of morning light
Is poured through
Tinted blinds

Shadow-blinds
Are a fan of light
Half open on
The bedroom's floor

What can I say
To bring this
Moment
To you?

The dark honey
Of steep light
Is poured
Through the oak trees

Moments later
One tree's
A photo negative
Black with

Sun-streamings behind
Eye-blink of time
O I can never say
What I most have to

Shiver of morning
Through the membrane
Of walls I feel
The city I feel

Sounds of activity
Come through
The blinds
Light is filled

With the sound
Of voices

What cannot
Be said
I must say
What cannot be spoken

Speak
However much fragment
The end
Of a cut branch

Is a tree root
Reaching deep in earth

Secrets yet unread
In the labyrinth
Of tree bark

In the Tarot
Of the moth's wing
Unspoken disclosures

My shadow sweeps
Over the grass
Long leg strips
Scissoring

The golden green
Of the autumn field
Burdock and weeds
Is all that I'm cutting

Yet I'm glad glad glad
To take it anyway

I remember
A house
By a crossroads
In the north

There are green fields
All around
There's an oak tree
And a screened porch

A red tractor
Out back
A man walking
Toward the barn

Light
Falls through
The blinds
Slicing my face

Someone else
Would see
A helix
A water-spout

Of spinning dust
Above my lips

The spreading light
Through the blinds' sieve
The annunciation
Of silence

A chorus of voices
Hidden so far
In the caverns
Of light beams

Now the feeling's
Around me
That I am not I
The I who is speaking

Not the I
Not myself
Not myself
Not another

A third one
Walks through me

Lying here
In the rain of dust
Of evening light
Through my window

Striped with Venetian blinds'
Tiger of sunset
Behold the Monarch wings
Of glowing orange curtains

It is said
If the dreamer
Dreams
Of himself asleep

He will wake
To find another
With his face
His voice his name

I slept and
Dreamed myself asleep
O what is my name
My real name

My real not
My mirror face
Having never heard
My voice

How would I ever
Know it

The blind eye
Of the moon
Has watched me
As I slept

I felt it
On my forehead
Like the coldest
Coldest sun

Now what am I to do
On what road
Down what leaf-green
Valley shall I run

Again and again
My love lies bleeding
Here in the arbor
He is crucified

Among white roses
I see his fair skin
Among red roses
His parted lips

Deeper in shadows
Of thorns and flowers
Than any has known
I see him there

Further in darkness
Beneath the shadows
I feel his torment
In the briar's sharp bones

Not for myself
But for all others
Here in the dark of night
I think and write

It is not I alone
Who soon will go
Nor is it only they
But all

Back
Into its pure
Concept
The whole

Immensely opened world
Will close

I am so near
To what I will
Have to be
I am so near

That I can only
Think and replay
Everything done
Or said

Empty and full
At once
Nothing really special
And yet final eternal

My gesture
Is empty
My hands
Hold nothing

Returning love
To those who
Have given me
The rose of roses

From the eternal tree

O the lost roads
Along which
My steps are heard
Light of the sunset

Red so red
Tinted crossroads
Where shadows
And highway are tilted

Shadow and sign
Pointing
Opposite ways

Shadow and road sign
Like minute and
Hour hand
In late afternoon

Late earth-face clock

If the dead
Are ashes
The living
Are paper

Blood
Is the
Water-color
Of power

Now
In the time
Of echoing

Thought
Life
Always occur
Within film

Always within
Within

O how well
I must
Use up
My freedom

For how well
I know
It does not
Exist

In the amber
And orange sunlight
Tilting
Across the evening plain

Shadows lengthen
And lengthen
Gating
The crossroads

Shadow-webbing
Our syllables
Can never
Stitch through

Earliest sentences
Of night

In the dead
Language
That I speak
There are words

Still unspoken
Still uncoined
Undefined
And now

Who will know them?
In the dead
Language
That I speak

Now, lyrist
Go with tapers quenched
Into the night

Mystery
Must wait upon your step

Your ear will find
The brightest silences
Silver of moonlight
Falling
Through the leaves like dust

Gather a hand of shadows
In the strings of light

FIRST OF ALL AND ALWAYS

Nightlife/Gate of Hell

I

Black sun
On white landscape
Silent steps
Of shadow

Blue sun
On gray landscape
Rumors, rumors
Of darkness

II

The spikes
Of the clock
Impale
The falling minute

Each second
Jumps
To its death
Fleeing the fire

We jump to
Our death
Impaled
Or remain here

Burning in our fires

III

Black roads
Of white dust,
Moonlight
Like chalk

Men of blue shadows,
Women of
Deeper shade, O
Labyrinth of graves

Deep roads
Through
The night, the night
Of the guitar

And a wind
Of brushed cymbals

IV

Where you have set
Your hand
On the wooden bar
A card of fate
Has been set

You cannot see it
Yet you pick it up

V

Labyrinth of streets
This way and
That way
And yet no way out

So many routes
In the crowded bar,
Each face
A mask of black leaves

O hell-red
Exit sign,
And yet
No way out

VI

Bright globe
Of mirrors
Suspended
Over the dance floor

Light-spokes
Come from it
Like streaks of light
In teary eyes

O sacred heart
Radiating gold threads
Your miraculous appearance
Here in the crowded dark

And when the ball
Begins to spin
(Love makes
This world go round)

Leopard spots of light
Flow over the walls
Fan out
Across the ceiling

Leopard spots
Or peacock-tail eyes
Ovals of light
Like blood corpuscles

Flowing past
Along the artery's
Throbbing and
Narrow walls

VII

Dressed
In black fishnets
Peekaboo blouse

She thinks
The street a slot
Her life a quarter

Dressed
In black fishnets

How many,
How many quarters
Can be shoved
Into a slot?

Dressed
In black fishnets
And peekaboo blouse

VIII

The wind
Sounds like sand
Pouring down
Through dry leaves

Leave me here
In the dark square bleeding

The night
Is an hourglass
Spilling
Its sand stars

Leave me here
In the dark square bleeding

The world
Is the narrow waist
Where the sand falls through
Packed close for an instant

Yes leave me here
In the dark square bleeding

IX

A young
Woman
Vomits
Forehead against

The parking meter

X

O moon
In black trees,
Green eyes
Hide in the night

O red sun
Under the earth,
What red eyes
Watch you?

XI

Pills
In the hand

Lines
In the hand's palm

Pathways

XII

Stung
By the wasp
Of brandy

The scorpion
Of tequila has
Its stinger

Deep in your throat

XIII

O love
My sting

Has been
Sucked
Out of me

A hook
Stuck
In the gaping fish

Of your mouth

XIV

Woman
So lovely

Mascaraed
In darkness

XV

Hideous
The nakedness
Of a face

Suite for Music

The Task

Night wood. Dark paths.
Small candle deep
In the tunnel of trees,

How long must I carry you?
How far into the night?

No One

Green moonlight
On broken pavement.

In the distance –
A car,

Some people walking
And a voice off...

Somewhere.

Listening

Very last light of evening.
At horizon
A door is sealed.

Rumors of light
Just past
The wall of night.

Solitude

How you cry out
Silent
In the silence

O drunken
Drunken voice.

Oedipus

Hand on my face
Eyes in my head

My
Fingers
Searching a face

My eyes

And now the darkness

Longing

One grain of light
Far in the blue
Of early night

Once again
Evening star

Secrets Everywhere

Standing so drunk
On the street

Wind trees and
Wind and trees

Moonlight
Through yellow leaves

--There are secrets,
Secrets everywhere

Self-Portrait

Tire scars
In the frozen mud
Filling up with snow

My eyes my nose my mouth
Filling up with the dark

Sunset Suite

I

A single tree at the edge of the plain

Sunset blades cut through the cresting wave of the tree
whose lungs open to the drowning mouth of fire

Sun-scream echoing across darkened distances
Continent-wide light structures altering, fading
Crab nebula of violet and purple cloud
with alto-cirrus pincers
Raveled braids, ringlets of charcoal cumuli

A single red eye narrowed, radiating, blinding

The blackened landscape a stony shelf
before the bright red Medusa

But the sun itself drowns in sunset, pulled down by a
vanishing point

The continent is drawn down
in the space-vortex

Now the cindered ultraviolet locks
The planet-scape of carbon

II

Memory on memory
now filled with fountain-oblivion

Astonishing raiment of the night sky
filled with cloud-tatters

Glories

Pomp and processional of sunset
filled with streaks of blood

Witnessed by no one

III

In the twilight – now –
There is more than one world.
There are two – one of darkness,

The world that we see every day,
Though now, in the declining planes of the scorched sun,

It is dimmed;
And one of light
Never yet seen, though still guessed at,
Sensed
In the unspoken words withheld from the dreamer
By the dream,

The eyes that say yes
 if a letter – yes one letter only –
Less than a syllable
 is dropped or forgotten
This the tiniest gateway
 yet all

By which all might come flooding and flooding

Bright waters
 light
And bright waters
 voices
Open the eyes there
 folded up in the night
Eyes of a million pages
 mouths of a million voices
 these voices

Open the eyes there
 folded up in the night
Open to the bright unlimited darkness
 the wind-filled
 agitating freedom

Of the cosmos

And yet still

The enormous eye of the night sky

So wide wide open
 to a chip of moon

V

Bundles of stars
and the sharp stick of light jabbed in so far

I see it is a time of blindness after all

Is no eye open in the planet of stone
falling through silence?

The stars have secreted their voices
in the wings of the white moth
In the green wings of the Luna moth
the eye of the jaguar

In the amber wings of the Io moth
the choruses of parchment
In the black wings of the Promethea moth
the Queen of Spades

The orders of unreason and the box of paradigms

Poisonous metal of the seven deadly sins

O poisonous satisfaction

Greed with its eyes of coal
and its heart of snow

Conceit
so proud of its carrot-like nose

And pride so pleased with its conceit

Poisonous satisfaction

VI

And then to awake

And yet what do you do? Where do you look?

What's the first thing you see?

Whispering of the voice of worms
the centipede awareness of the Self

Nothing can penetrate that segmented life
Armor on armor

chitonous form of Man
Tripodal locomotion
(legs move three at a time
for greater stability)

At least one hundred legs in all
for firm and ratifiable
possession

Poisonous satisfaction

The fellowship of hydrocarbons

The communion of stupefaction

The entertainment of genocide

The life of the death of the body

The death of the life of the soul

How many names to be signed on this line?

VII

You
 there in the directed powers of the cosmos
 that move about you
 around you

Speaking through the lapses of the rational intelligence

You who are the subject of a million syllables
spoken not by you but for you

And before you
in the darkness where
you've almost lost the nerve to take one further step

You around whom the darkness glitters with its numinous activity
Like the moonlight shine on running-together streams
in the dark river

Powers within each breath of conscious life
Each syllable of consciousness
each moment of your active
being, there

The blue-green moonlight brings out flowers
From the depths of the midnight garden in the backyard

The flowers are visible in the dark
And their color is not their color

it is another thing

Blue-yellow flowers against the dark
suspended

it is other than it seems

You
who bury every breath of the night air in yourself

Somewhere
and not even very deep within
yet buried still

You
in whom so much is lost
in whom so much has disappeared

VIII

Filled
though unknowing
with the active powers of the day

Held
now
open to infinities of night

A witness
for this moment
to the eternity of its powers

In whom so much is slumbering
Around whom so much is awake

IX

O tall

Tall

wind-agitated
tree of night

Night-tree

an ascending column

And far beyond and around it
the falling lights

Day has its one world only

The night has so many

Yet what do you have inside of you
Tree of no single voice?

How many worlds
would you need

To speak it?

X

Star-milk

Sipped through the straw of infinity
fills the desiring eye

The salt sea
in a tear drop of moments

Distended
distended
distended

Farther and farther

Life Writing

Brief thaw and
blue light.
Sodden evening,

The ice made thin
as bible paper
by the sun.

The wall of sleep,
the sentences.

The skin of the mirror
peals away.

Far beneath, within,
wires leading
elsewhere.

Cold wind blown
down from
the opening of night.

The pages will not
let you return
to the first line.

In the water
there are silences,
and in each silence

pages and still pages.

To the Small Place

Leaf-fall and rain
in the evening,
yellow green streaks
across purple light, water stone
glittering and still

More rain comes after –
then night wing, and I pass
through the tree's feathers:
white moon spider thread

Moonlit owl shadow,
place of smallest steps –
air-breath, water-tap, sand mud
and needle woven mat

Catastrophe

Echoed laughter
of well water
breaking
night's iris and pupil
Stars bleed
into the surface
The quiver of ripples
is a page
leafed away
And the well
drinks all of space
down into itself

At the bottom
that cannot be seen,
the faint light
of voices

Sky

Sun like a grate
of burning coals
falls below
charred limits of earth

Drops past
the edge of infinity,
past earth's eyelid
always closed

Carbon smudge
of finger prints
on the air, and yet
the horizon's hand

Can never stop closing –
fingers snuff the last flame –
sun-candle
quenched in clouds

And later, small candlelight
lies sunk in stars,
so infinitely far
beneath the letters of darkness

Class

Green light of
The setting sun
Past the black bramble of trees
And the dark rooftops

O I would reach
My hand far out
And far beyond that faint green
Reaching out toward the past

Reaching outward to touch
The leaves of the trees
The early spring rain
Falling cool onto a face

My mother and my father
Before I knew them
When they were young
The lives they never had

The bright world unknown

Italian Immigrants, North Country

Tall grass
Of the yellow field
Seethes dryly
In October. Light is orange
Above the amber horizon.
Rusty-shadowed clouds
Cross the sky.
Counterpart waves of shadow
Run over the face of earth.
Grass ripples and grows dim
In rust-red light.

Blood clot sun.
Horizon of dried blood.

There is no one here now.

But who is coming?
There where the fence post,
Rain-gnawed and gray,
Hangs askew,
Or where an old path fades
Among small apple trees?

Who measured off
Hotbeds?
Bound up bundles of onions?
Who comes with two saw horses?
Who goes with nothing?

The Old Town

Around the monument in the public square
There are new flowers planted.
They haven't yet come up. What kind are they?
Don't bother. Names will be different soon.

Copper twilight falling, filling the entire world.
The ragged clouds of after-storm.
Long shadows in the puddled, shining street.
The indigo sunset. Two black crows in a tree.

The wet black trees. The wind and the rain.
Church bells. The traffic's noise. Some people
Walking together into a bar. Twilight and silence.
The evening echoes far into the other world.

Boundary

I

Pink sunset

O winter sky

Do I feel my life passing by
I wonder

II

Winter sky at evening

Pink light flushes the tan bricks of a chimney

Purple smoke billowing

The air so cold

III

All the beautiful faces
Of the passers by

City Afternoon

Rain changes
the air the
space dark grained
between the buildings,
teary headlights

And the street
glassy with it,
the wet
windows the water beads
the sign bits

The streaked
compass sections
of the windshield wipers,
the red light
also wet

Oklahoma

I Dawn

Pumpkin-colored. Earth.

II Wind

Trees reach out so far to catch me.

III Midday Sun

My hand is on your head, leaning.

IV Shadow

At midday
Shadows are cut
In the red clay,
Clay the color

Of an orange flower pot.
And the edge of a shadow
Is straight.

Here there is one pink stone
Half inside of it.

Diminishment

Staying up late reading one night
I thought with a quiet and subdued joy –
Half thought, really, or it was less than thought
But an inward and private feeling of comfort –
Of the wonderful dinner you had made that night,
Of the equally nice one you were planning for
tomorrow,
Thought with gratitude of the fascinating book,
Of the glowing warm space heater by the bed.
(It was mid-February, cold and snow outside.)

Then suddenly, unaccountably,
A change occurred.
Something was taken from me.

For there are many
Who do not have
Warm beds to sleep in,
Glowing space heaters,
Books, food.

The Unfinished World

Down in the cleft
Of night, the pipe
Of the lamp's neck
Fills the room with
Dusty particles, cilia, bright atoms,
Eye motes showered out
Into the cubicled darkness
Piled round with books,
A box of dark top soil where
The seeds of light might lodge,
Pushing roots into all corners.
I turn the tap off: blank,
Then ragged buds of space
Bloom in an emptiness.
Darkness spreads then settles
Into outlines of dim forms.
Darkness must settle then
For my crumpled shape,
For my ticking mind.

Where have you gone
That were so furious
Once for justice, truth?
The voice must whisper
Here at the fraying end
Of patience, life, and time.
My mind must pause
And wait for stillness, blindness
To restore its clarity.
Where have you gone
That were so marked

For beauty and its cadences?
Soon though you must fling
Your voice, your self
Into the clamorous
Spaces, dark assemblies, nonetheless,
And once again, after a time
Return to write
The bright, unfinished world.

A Field Somewhere in the North Country

December night. The stars shine brightly
Over the deserted hill
And the snow-covered field,
Over the luminous forgotten earth,

The earth forgotten by the bird,
The fox, the bear, forgotten by men,
Forgotten by the sun.

Tonight it lies abandoned, silent,
Glimmering with its light of snow;
It shows palely like an open bed,
A white bed sheet, in a darkened room.

Human Error

A child is a flower, a seed,
A child is a growing vine,

An animal, a tiger,
An eel, a lamprey,
A leech upon your breast,

A bottomless well
Everything goes down,
Everything, everything.

The child is money that is not there,
A doctor you cannot pay,
Medicine you cannot buy.

The child is trouble
In the street,
But no one notices,
For there are other children now —

Mistake upon mistake,
Error on error piles up,
Historical error of human life.

The child is a man at last,
A woman at last,
But no one knows.

When does the burden
Of guilt come to us
For what we are
And for what we are not?

When is it lifted?
How can it be?

Latest Hour

Night air comes through the open window.
I'm lying here, my light's not out yet.
'What am I doing now?' I think,
Then even that thought leaves me...
Stretched lengthwise, leaning on one elbow.
A gnat the size of a period
Crawls across the burning white page,
Then flies up in a tiny manic spiral.
And then I turn the light out.

In Memory of John Gardner

No haze is on the field this afternoon.
The sun is white and hot in the blue sky
And Queen Anne's lace all through the wild field
Is white and swaying in the warm dry breeze.

On the road the dust is white and scattered stones
Glint in the burning light of the hot sun,
The sun that at the center of the sky
Burns down in midday heat on field and road.

The afternoon is silent and the heat
And sunlight throb upon the distant hill.
And now there is not any breeze to stir
A single leaf or single blade of grass.

Now stop one minute by the roadside fence.
However many miles you walk today
You will not find another hour like this.
You hear the sound of cicadas in the field.

Oklahoma, The Hills Are Red

One hundred degrees or more today. The heat
Is water rippling from the chalk-white road
That leads up through the oxide-blooded hills.
The sky's a pale, pale blue without one cloud.

You could walk up there. Slowly lose yourself
In heat and sun, silence, red earth, shadow.
(Finally even that would disappear.)
It's so easy to imagine doing it.

I look up where the road turns round a curve,
Meeting the white blue of the empty sky
Right where the excavated roadside bares

Its pumpkin-colored dirt to the bright day.
Overwhelming sun, a road, uncanny earth;
No footprints visible ahead of me.

First of all and Always

*Hands of the wind over the naked face of the earth.
Along paths of the earth, and on the waters,
The opening eyes of the humans.*

I

Rising from sleep and smoke, we move from what is near to what is far off. Yet in cupped hands, the water also grows distant, with rumors and rumors of stars.

II

Take up the glass, but don't hold onto it.

III

Work your hand into the dirt like a mole, going all the way up to the wrist. You feel the webbing of the plant's hair-like roots. Does the hand enjoy this world of cool dampness and pressure? Instinctively it hollows out a small hole amid the larger roots, as though it were forming around itself the rondure of a guitar.

IV

Is it possible that the flower I see in my mind when I think of a flower, and yet no particular one, is the same as the flower a Mayan peasant might have seen two thousand years ago when he did the same? What flower could this be?

V

That point in life when the erotic becomes a resource one is keeping in reserve; it is not present all the time. In youth there had been a deluge, but now there is only an earthen jug of cool water kept in the dark of a cellar.

VI

Now: vacant honeycomb of the cigarette ash.

VII

At the edge of the city, Time is only the tall grass waving. Men, Women will become the seeds of tall grass....

VIII

You speak of the infinite faces of the living. But is it only humans who live? Flocks of crows, the small trout in the stream, horses, my dog with his topaz eyes. And then, too: the wind in the trees, the trees themselves, the rain, the clouds....

X

A mummy of ash within the fireplace's pyramid. With a poker I break open wrappings of unexpected jewels.

XI

Someone asks, When are you most tenaciously alive? In sleep.

XII

When is the fist the most beautiful part of the body? And yet surely the hand is.

XIII

Sitting by the open window drinking a cup of tea, the branches with their green buds, the air still cool yet filled with the scent of grasses and the rain, the evening light sunk just below the peak of the high roof, the plum colored shingles of the other roofs, glare of reflected sunset on the greenhouse panes, traffic sounds from the next street over, the stereo from upstairs and, as though from the greatest distance, the sound of the church bell.

REQUIEM FIRES

I

Bianca, the white one, ten thousand days your heralds,
sunrise and sunset, have immolated themselves in
the fires of such purity, and yet still you are a rose
petal of night wrapped in the whorls of my sleeping
tongue as it dreams the seven seas of harvest while
drowning in the small shell of your ear.

For you the beach of lidded eyes will open and give up its
rumor of white foam as you step from star to star
along the night-strewn sands.

For you the sea's blue wind will open hidden gates within
the branches of the pines, and through them will
come forth auguries of the rain.

The whispered secrets of your wisdom shine among the
green knives of the grass or hang suspended,
stopped like a fly in the shatter of the spider's
windshield.

Bianca, you are the white one, and so no poppy can console
us as we wait here longing for the blood of your
kiss, the darkness of your parted lips.

II

The twilight of your speech whispers through the husk of
dry leaves.

The wind pins each one to its open eye for an instant, then
discards it, rushing onward to tangle in the auburn
beards of wheat leading downward through the
darkness of your open thighs, there at the burning
limit of the world.

My sunset speech flares in the living syllable of breath,
laughs at the mare's tail tinted pink and orange.
Yet the horses of the night have slipped beyond the harness
grip of chill late flowers hanging in my grasp.

Still, inside the nacred shell of the white moon, the chorus
of the drowned sighs out its surge and blood beat,
albeit tinily and far off, high in one corner of the
night.

III

Your naked body in the dark room shows dimly white.
And only now do I think, Who is this really?
We have nothing in common except life itself.

The ash of your skin blows away, and the coals lie beneath.

Our two forms on the wall. Your arms and your legs and
your legs. And I a Laocoon in the hydra of shadows.

My breath clouds the glass of your cheek. It blows away
the soft ash of your skin, and the white coal beneath
glows brighter still.

IV

You shake the dead leaves of night from your train of
stars. Circled in green branches, your eyes close on
the chaff of the city, and only the wheat of time is
gathered in your arms.

Born with the rain on your breast, the tall grass through
your hair, petals of wild flowers in your heart and a
poppy of darkness asleep beneath the roses of your
tongue,

Your waist is the path of moonlit dust I must tread to the
end of my days; your arms are the labyrinthine
circle of bright sand I must bleed in and die in, night
upon night, gored by the minotaur of dreams.

And yet, for you everything. A thousand lakes and rivers
drain themselves to fill your eyelid of a single leaf
whose skeleton of veins could drink down the
whole sun.

Entire oceans could not drown the depths of earnest sleep
you harbor in the laughter of your eye, the hoarfrost
moon.

Yet still I come, setting my two feet upon the water pebbled
with shatters of moonlight, pacing the deep currents
out beyond the capillary nets hanging upside down
along the green walls of the dark.

V

If life is the first thing and death the second, a third thing
walks through me.

Where my mouth opens, the sand is poured in; where my
ear listens, the paintings have been hung. Where my
eye watches, the music has been conducted.

The others, the counterparts, sometimes called women, I
see but do not see. I feel their presence and yet do
not feel it. Their beauty penetrates my being, but
only as far as my eyes -- no longer the burning form
hanging from the bough of the living tree hidden
inside each breath.

If life is the first thing and death is the second, a third thing
walks through me.

VI

Gray blue of moonlight on the snowfield of the open bed.
I see the pale body lately disrobed.

Yet now her lips of stone will not part to break the
cemetery angel of her smile.

Stone lions shaken from the great hive of the sun appear in
the dusty twilight of the empty streets.

The woman with one eye and three mirrors for teeth waits
for me at the end of the block.

My name, in hieroglyphic script indecipherable to all but
me and my double, is inscribed upon her tongue, on
her arm, and on the bottom of her sandal.

VII

You, the darkly shadowed, anointed with the blood of a
million doves whose hearts are red roses dreaming
of suicidal flight

You, the illuminated, initiate of the mantis who waits
reading from his breviary of green far deep in the
hill of tomorrow

You, the immortal, who comes with a doily of frost to
cover the infinite couch of the grass

You the pure and impure at once and by means of thought
divorced from the body, who come from the sunset
of iodine in a coach of dust

You, the unholy and holy, who govern all things with your
branch of green pine broken from the arm of night's
water, who bless the green points of the aphid's eyes
with the resurrected halo of dawn, with the
penitential hood of night

You must know that deep within me are five rivers
following their valleys spreading from the sun,
valleys of arterial tree roots flowing from a burning
stump

Deep within me are five instruments, the concert of savage
bird voices gathered in the treble clef of noon,
quieted in the lento of the evening, silenced in the
unwritten sonata of the night

Deep within me, pond ripples touch the four walls of five
rooms lying sunk beneath the lake of windows
whose glass was molten in the kiln of the sunrise

Deep within there are five keys to the doors of infinite
houses where the endless heights and depths of the
nightmare's stairwell leads to the owl's autumn
sanctuary far away in a closet in the dusk of the
cedar wood

VIII

Only one key can unlock the gold ciborium hidden by
moths in the side of the oak tree.

Only one key is like a match whose faintest sulfur scent is
left on the fingers of the glove which, in the realm
of the apparent, has been taken for my hand.

Only one key has five roses twining around it, a caduceus
of fire as when a dry stick is burnt far away in the
woods to serve as a beacon.

Only one key for me to open the boathouse where a hollow
acorn is the craft I must use to sail into the velvet
water of the dark, the infinite depths of the oak
leaves.

IX

Oil derrick of night that leads to a black pit in the sky, and
I have fallen down so deeply here, so far from
original starlight.

My voice cannot climb past oil echoes of multiform
coverings, wrappings, in which are concealed a
black carbon ash, the null substance, beneath an
apparent diamond of mirrors.

The tunnel-like well leads down to the forest of charred
table legs, all that is left of the burnt house of cards.

With a voice of oil slick and a face of oil ash, with my eyes
cataracted with carbon lace, gypsy moth wings of
bitumen and benzene,

What can I see and what can I say? How can the aura of the
Moonlit One appear?

How can the furrow call to the seed and the golden dam-
burst of wheat journey toward sunrise on green
waterways?

How can the diamond of rain fall into the spider web of my
hand?

How can I reclaim the sixth sense of the days of
awakening, moments of amazement beneath the
green rain-chimes of April's woodland?

How can the aura of the Moonlit One call to me in the
necessary silences of silence?

X

The amber wheat field tilts away from the methiolate
sunset and slopes down to the black fringe
of wood, to the gray-green and light-burnished
river.

The evening colors are so deep and rich, surely they must
be trying to speak the truth.

Two figures are wandering there along the bank,
whispering. One carries a pine branch, and the
other some cut wild flowers.

Sometimes, separated, they call out to each other, and their
voices are heard on the opposite bank, although no
one is there.

And while they are walking there by the river they are also
walking above in the field of broom-yellow wheat
seething and tinted pink in the red light from the
sun.

For they are counterparts, wandering. Which are the souls
and which are the bodies, in the late light, near the
green river, walking?

XI

Friend from earliest times, dim in recollection, you exist in twilight only, though often there I see the sun that warmed us as we lay in the tall grass, or sat in the garden seat as the bumblebees visited the pink hollyhocks: July afternoon was bright and warm and silent everywhere around us.

Autumn evening, and your cloak of scarlet leaves: a fireplace was waiting, and I smeared the black ashes on my face and on your face, indecipherable calligraphy, mysterious and beautiful.

Winter night, and hundreds of eyes inhabited the darkness of the snow-slashed fir trees. The figures of the stars were very close around the treetops. In the supernatural moonlight every snow crystal shined visibly.

Spring morning, and early youth is indescribable, yet we were playing in the empty schoolyard, the two of us the first ones there -- you above in the crotch of the oak tree, and I below you on the ground, looking up, calling.

XII

Your face made of snowflakes melts as my hand gloved
with its own fate draws the inscriptions of
memory -- calligraphy traced on the absence of your
eyes, of your mouth, of your brow of redemptive
light, your aura of intelligent privacy.

Snow-characters brushed on the paper of twilight. Late sun
on the tinted snow fills them with fire and a deeper,
lengthening script of shadows.

XIII

Blood clot of light: sun-artery closing.

The light-cone of evening is a trumpet announcing the
dusk-world.

The woman of crystal, the figure of immaculate glass,
whose form cannot tolerate the touch of a hand, on
whom even one breath leaves its mark, appears in
the street.

There are voices calling from deep in the grass. A bush
casts a medusa of shadow on the cracking mirror of
the sidewalk.

XIV

And there was Levanna, whose smile was a razor flipped open, in whose glittering eye the seven deadly sins sparkled.

Levanna, the foundling of tides, whose hair was the stone sea's harvest of weeds in which bright shells, stray pieces of the moon's shattered face, were braided.

Levanna, the cresting wave has flowed back, and the prisoner of foam has vanished in the surf's disintegrating chains. The captive of moments, Oblivion, has fled, and the day of remembrance glitters on the field of green.

Levanna, the medusa has taught you, the hammerhead worships at your deepest shrine, the burning enigmas of light cannot shine through your veils of water to illuminate the black scorpions hidden in the azure and amethyst of your man-of-war's ice.

XV

Bianca, for you the enormous green fingers of weeds grow
through the iris of sunlight from the depths of the
pond, as though a gigantic hand were reaching into
your convex soul reflected there.

The tongue of every leaf has drunk the seas of light, the
oracles of harvest, the glossary of darkness and the
counted syllables of the rain.

And yet countless and countless still are the dialects of
green for my reawakened daughter, confusing her,
and countless the waves of light on the infinite
sands of Now, splashing her, bathing her, dissolving
her.

Mascaraed Egyptian eyes inscribed as with a letter opener
on the paper birch have read the hieroglyphs of
night.

What are they seeing as we walk past them now? What are
the leaves repeating? What are the roots feeling, the
net of light sunk in the wave of earth?

Yet we know it could only be of you in your earthly
embodiment and of your beauty, which is
not of this earth, Bianca.

XVI

Sunrise fills the birch tree with more eyes than are shown in its white bark. Eyes of nocturnal spirits, angels of observance, of watching and listening, are asleep behind every leaf.

Their forms of supernatural light are invisible. Charged to exist until they have given the fullest possible account, none has yet returned to its source.

It could be that they have forgotten their origin, or been forgotten by it, and so are abandoned to us here, in the lost realm.

XVII (i. m. J.A.)

In the evening the air is filled with a violet loneliness.
Echoes await the darkness and quiet, which the tired
heart also craves. Charred embers of evening ruin,
sunset.

Sources deep inside the night have opened. They address us
with great persistence, albeit silently.

In the spectral hour, I too become a specter. See: the earth
has the thinnest lacquer of twilight poured over it.
And the moment stretches out so far, like the
shadows. It is the time of longest shadows.

Yes, now I must tell you, it is time for me to confide it:
misfortune has followed me. I come walking back
from the garden, or I have come from my long walk
on the Old Rome State Road at the furthest edge of
town, the dust of the highway on my shoes, or I
have come from a walk late at night when the bats
were flitting from tree to tree, and now you can see
it around me, the shadow of ill-luck. Yes, there are
many types of evil.

I am a man from the country, it is true. We have known
each other all our lives. I am as familiar as the post
by the gate. And yet there are many kinds of evil.

The release from misfortune is merely a step beyond, past
the gate of two maple trees, into the cool northern
night.

XVIII

With your eyes like black coffee, with your voice like a
candle burning, with your speech like a bell ringing
in the Sicilian distance

With your skin like the petals of a dahlia gathered between
thumb and forefinger, with your breath like the odor
of nutmeg, with your hair like a fire starting up in
the grate in a dark room

With your carriage like the resurrected sun, with your
mouth made of small dry autumn leaves, with your
two lips of poppy and oil

With memory, deepest memory beyond memory, like a
cicada calling in the bright hot stillness of noon,
with this page of insignificant markings, with my
foregone lives, with my sawdust desire, with my
tireless searching for the end.

XIX

In the necropolis of the Hanged Man the moths of burnt paper fill the open mouth of the stone lion asleep in the ochre light, in the bright dust of midday. O the silence of the public square.

Yet the Ace of Pentacles is drawn in the dust with a pointer of shadow, there at the center of the crossroads, while the diagram of sunset is burned by the inhabitants of the dark world in order to be drawn over again tomorrow.

The fire has charred the land stretching away into night and future time.

The rosary of crow's eyes is lost in the shadowed grass while the rosary of acorns and chestnuts lies sunk through the floor of the green pond roofed with an inverted sun.

XX

It was an image of fate that tangled the autumn streets of
the city where my way was barred with the evening
shadows, where I was forced this way and that.

And there you were waiting, Tarot of golden hair. Did I
create the image of fate from out of myself or from
you?

O the black empty night when I lay in my bed and the clock
that is unseen and unheard, the invisible, was
known in its ultimate presence through every corner
of the room.

How sweet to cling to you swiftly fleeing my grasp. A card
in a deck of cards is like a fish in a swiftly flowing
stream. Tarot of golden hair, how bright your green
eyes were in the dark room.

Why do I feel that knowing you was my fate? Why do I
feel my life marked forever?

XXI

Woman of stars, your glass of night filled with the
alchemy of chance, I play the music of evening
backward, filled with the spirit of transgression.

The deep purple of night will fade from your water-
bearing form: the vessels of night and infinity
slowly drain to evening and the earthly horizon.

Raise the sun just one notch: purple twilight rusts into
sunset. Crimson of late sun over carbon slashes of
charred skin.

Time slips backward one notch more – orange and amber
rayed and announced in light-cone trumpets of
iodine, flooding the forest of melted lead trees. The
pewter of opened earth is furrowed with puddles of
mercurochrome.

The air is amber and lightening as time reverses itself still
more.

And now it is full of flakes of sparkling ash – here, here,
here – fireflies rising like effervescence in the glass
of evening, small bits of ash still burning, flaked off
from the fires burning the crumpled paper of the
hills.

XXII

Uncanny the few drops of time that we shake from the
pitcher of night, as we break ourselves into smaller
and smaller pieces, here where fragments of the
moon are dissolved in the black stream.

In the darkness of the yard, petals are falling from the white
roses. How beautiful! Fill my hands with the
tangled voices of your hair, for you know I can give
only myself, albeit it is many selves.

Black roses are twining deep in the well hidden at the
bottom of the pond. We must walk to the edge of
the world and then slide ourselves onto the other
side before we can find them.

Yet perhaps we do not really want to find them, perhaps we
will wait right here where we are – thinking,,
considering – for a while longer.

XXIII

They do not think of the moon and they have fallen asleep
under the rain where now the scarlet leaves cover
them.

They have grown from the bud of the same rose. It is said
they are strangers to the green pond in which they
are bathing.

When they emerge from the pond, the moonlight will turn
their wet legs to crystal stems. Angels of hoar-frost
and ice are hidden among the birch trees.

In the sun the bathers' long hair will return to its color of
indigo and deepest black. And yet they can always
be found, if you should wish it, somewhere in the
night.

XXIV

O the cloth of black linen covering the idol's stone face in
the amber-lit public square. Rose and marigold of
sunset. Jellied gasoline has turned the trees to
charcoal in the blood-tinted distance.

Here the petals cannot be plucked from the rose. Here the
one of moon and moth wings is zebra-striped in the
shadows, is ever-retreating, never to be grasped.

Here the moonchild bathes in the fountain yet cannot be
seen.

Here the water itself is stone. It is that which the green-
exemaed dolphins are made of.

O my love, you who are not my love, your dress is a
webbing of unpredictable desires here in the
unnoticed darkness of a world on fire.

XXV

Cryptogram of bones that shine phosphorescently in the distance as one approaches the city. Neon-ravaged night.

The streets sucked so quickly past. Then the black tunnel of time pouring onward. The tunnel-hypodermic is filling with our having-been-there-soon-to-be-elsewhere.

A cross, another cross, an X, numbers, a small rhomboid, cursive script – lime green, insect-wing red, indigo, turquoise, more-than-electric blue: smeared light-script of desire and mania.

Then spinning darkness and slowed time. Rising we float free of the wreckage. Yet we still do not know where we are.

XXVI

Autumn night. I sit on the edge of my bed. The moon –
very bright – shines in through the open window.
The light is blue-green, and it shines through the
black shadow-lace and wrought-iron grillwork of
metallic leaves, the branches of twisted iron.

The dark leaves, shivering in the wind, are matte black
against the luminous night sky. The bed sheet is a
dim blue-green in the moonlight. My feet rest in a
luminous puddle.

Then I take off my shirt. It falls to the floor in a crumple.

It looks like a clot of milk-skin that you skim from the
surface of heated milk. It lies looking dim and
remote at the edge of the light's semi-circle.

When I roll back into bed, I am like a diver rolling
backward from the side of a boat. I fall for an hour
before I at last break the surface.

I fall staring upward. My eyes are open or half open. Then I
forget myself and they close. With no one to see
me, or to see out of me, I vanish.

My body is left behind like an empty boat on the surface of
the night. Only the anchor-like weight of my breath,
tautly resisting the attraction of moonlight, holds it
in place until morning.

PART TWO

I

With your cleft of five candles and your breath twined
from strands of wood smoke, you have placed the
roots of the spreading chestnut tree at the base of
my tongue, and my speech must now be all dark
nuts and leaves, cool wind, the wet grass and rain.

With your heart of four apples and a dandelion seed-puff,
you touch the dry stream bed of my throat and it
fills with a braiding of water and light.

With your belly of burning wheat and your bed of crimson
leaves beneath the blue cloak of the autumn night,
you speak words of adolescent passion, clear and
pure like the streaks of rain drops on the starry
panes.

I remember the chill night, your lips and throat of fragrant
smoke, the empty and wind-blown streets, the
root-like touch of your hands. I can still remember.

II

O Bianca, how long we have both loved a forgotten
image, I of you and you, also, of me. O Bianca,
white dahlia of perennial obsession.

Black rain in the surging night drowns my several voices as
I call to the spider of recollection in its intricate web
of dust.

Tuning each voice to the other in the lightless intersection,
I await the coalescence like the needle-point of fire
beneath the sun's myopic lens burning its worm
hole of time through layers of newsprint.

And if it should not come, O Bianca, the whitely beloved,
how should I touch your hem of snow, your bodice
of frost leaves?

III

I am a young boy who brings wild flowers to his mother
that he picked near the fence at the edge of the
garden.

The plum tree holds purple light in the autumn evening,
and the visible forms of five angels gather silently
among the dark green leaves.

The child's face is covered with red leaves and gold leaves,
his eyes grow wide in the gathering darkness of
autumn. How sharp and sweet the scent of the cold
grass is at nightfall.

The friends have departed into the darkness, called away to
their several beds. It will be long before they are
seen again.

Under the white patterns of the frost, the heart of the world
grows still and quiet. It is as if a thousand white
hands of ice, small childish hands, had been
touching and touching it all over.

IV

The icy and porcelain face of the moon shatters and lies at
the bottom of the well.

On the petroleum surface of the pond, the silver eyes of the
drowned open and watch the two walkers who have
started to wade in.

The water is freezing, and yet it feels quite warm to them.

Though they are strangers who met just this evening at
twilight crossroads, they understand each other's
deepest wishes. O the enigma of crossroads.

Though every cell of their bodies is different, they are more
than identical twins.

The tall black grass at the pond's edge is coated with ice
and with phosphorescent moonlight.

The black paper shreds of the bats float above the treetops.
Frantic, calling inaudibly, perhaps trying to escape
the world entirely, they float up higher and higher
into the darkness.

V

The drifting one floats out into the mysterious night: blue moonlight, the dissolving constellations of fireflies pinpoint the infinite depths of the meadow.

Have twenty years really passed? I am older and yet, somehow, not. I stand apart from my life, a visitor. It passes over me. Yet I do not touch it.

VI

I step down the tilting ladder of moonlight afloat in the
ash-silver sidewalk. There is a bright full moon.

Then a flow of black detaches itself from the night hill and,
with a silent precise hurry, moves down toward the
road in the green moonlight.

It is like a dribble of black ink poured down the hill and
over the face of the street, which lies empty of
traffic.

A fox? But no, there are several faces dissolved in the wind
sock of black which ripples and bulges as a single
shape. There is movement but yet no visible legs.

Protrusion of embryonic heads. But it is only one head in a
long tube of blackness.

An enormous wooly bear of shadow? Then pairs of feet
detach themselves in a vague aura of associated
faces; a brief tremor of scattering in different
directions. Then coalescence, and the ink dribble
pours across the road into the green-black thicket.

VII

I have a god inside of me, a panther who is many gods –
voices of the delta clamoring in my ear.

When I breathe in I know them by feeling; breathing out, I
know them more clearly by thought.

The power trembles, brimming over like a glass. The world
trembles like an over-brimming glass. It is so full
and yet so fragile.

And now, what is the world? Often the voices tell me:
nothing.

And you, in our charmed association, in the aftermath of
our entanglement, ask me again, as though in
desperation: What is the world? Nothing, I have to
say.

Later, I enter you as a man must enter woman. What do I
feel? Is this the moment of my fondest nihilism, or
just my own heartbeat?

VIII

To go until one is stopped, and never to be stopped. The
coal in my eyes, whitened, grows cooler and gray.

I have the eyes of a stone lion, a jaguar of dust asleep in the
ochre light of the evening square.

Never again to have the blood-rose transfused through my
veins: O white beauty, life is yours entirely, I can
never rest in your absence.

Even the night's delta and the piranha-laced Amazon are
quiet at last.

Northern pocket of shadows, if I could rest in you, near the
walls of your apple orchards, reclining at length part
way under the earth, beneath an autumn
counterpane of gold and crimson leaves.

IX

The rose-knot laced so tightly in the night, out of the harp strings of moonlit shadows, is wound as close as any fist. Close and tight the petals of the rose which the night wind shakes and shakes.

Blind with whitest roses unpetaling from my eyes, I grope the intertwining strings, so many parts of my body caught and tangled in a vice-grip of silken and gold hair.

How often I have tried to move; how often I have tried to be still, but there is only the enwrapped struggle. A thorn is all I have to show, a thorn which sharply divides me. And yet I myself am a rose, pricked by its own thorn and leaking its blood away into the night.

X

The tall weeds that grew up through the lens of the green pond have broken their way into your eyes.

Brown leaves have grown out through your hair, and yellow straw is thatched together beneath your tongue.

Earth clods are caked along your fingers. Your breath is the scent of chill grass near the wood's edge in the cool evening.

Yet still the silver trout have spawned and flashed like arrows to the limits of your body.

The yellow sun shone warm and deep into the pool of your belly. A scented breeze comes in the shape of a girl and walks the green hill of your shoulder. I cannot know what you are, yet I know you have floated the world on a single bead of sweat.

XI

For the muse of nameless grief from whom I first learned
of the hopelessness of men: How I still see you –

With your smile of porcelain moonlight, with your heart of
three doves in which the enigma of the Incarnation
is rampant on a field of burning gold, with the
mercury of your tongue on the open hand of my
throat, with the small bird of your heart in the
paralyzed grasp of my two lips

With your eyes of violet death which choked the life out of
my immortal soul, with your lips of velvet hyenas
that laughed at my desire in the African midnight of
our charmed association, with your belly of clover
beneath an amber sunset on the morning of my
endlessly repeated execution

With your artery of white marble beneath the stethoscope
of my mouth, with your legs of dark enigma in the
blinding clarity of my adolescent desire, with your
night, your night, your hidden night retreating from
the sun of my imbecility

With your womb which was preparing to conceive a child
which was not mine, and yet the child lives now and
is, in a sense, I myself reincarnated in the
unfamiliar dimension of love

What was I before your teaching, your tutorial ardor in the
art of loss? O purest light of my absolute darkness,
how I recall you still, for after all you were my first
teacher, and from you I learned the infinite richness
of suffering in the poverty of the world

XII

With your skin made of moth wings as green as arsenic
which you spread open wide to reveal the cherished
chrysalis of light you carry within

With your skin of staring eyes spread like the peacock's
tail, hieroglyphic as the eyes of the white birch and
all of them tightly closed

With your mouth like a narrow crease in a bed of white ash
beneath which five coals still sparkle in the dark of
your skull

With the moon of melting ice which you carry between
your teeth of parched corn

With your fingers of crab apple branches and your nipples
of mullein, your heart like a dried milkweed purse --
O the silken threads of softest platinum, the angel
hair of a lizard's throat pouch

A thousand times and a thousand times more I have gone to
the well to gaze at your rippling and elusive
darkness, and yet it is always around me

Open the eyes of your skin beneath the shell of nacreous
light forming like mother-of-pearl around the black
yolk of your sleep

The Luna moth cannot hide all of day inside the green of its
blind eyes which are seeking and seeking inwardly,
your skin cannot continue to hold all the blackness
of my longing in its silken folds and shadows.

XIII

How strange the black perfume of your negligent roses
and how strange the taste -- the sweetness of the
bitterness of sweetness. Yet for this, three doves
have been sacrificed, bleeding into the chalice of
your mouth.

A thousand nights wild horses fell asleep in the moonlit
silence of the public square. Your sovereign power
summoned them, your majesty of orchids and of
jasmine compelled them to be still.

Over and over in drunkenness and folly I gathered in my
arms the frozen streams of your kisses. The river
was full of eyes, and these became a torrent of
white corpuscles streaming past.

Dust was the color of your eyes, and ash, and these were
underneath the bright flame of your tongue.

With a rose thorn I disemboweled myself, searching
through my entrails like a spider through its
web.

Your face I found there in the amniotic chords and dark
strands, these were also your hair. Your blood I
found there and the indelible stains of red petals.

XIV

O bright pathways tangled inside the rivers of every leaf
where the sun has burned and set ten thousand
times, sunk in embers beneath the coal of the tree's
bark – bed-of-coals life hidden just beneath the
ashes of the world.

Hemorrhage of crimson sunset, blood clot of final sun, and
the spider of darkness beneath the earth's edge
entangles the world in a webbing of stars.

Emptiest night wind. The leaves of the maples are asleep,
their eyes tightly closed. Yet the eyes of the birch
trees still watch you with interest.

Always at night you walk home by yourself. Lonely
pathways on the earth.

Emptiest night wind of emptiest earthly night. Yet still:
bed-of-coals life beneath the ashes of the world.

Search for it with your bare hands through the grate of
dawn.

XV

Long shadows from the orange and crimson sun. Charcoal
and crowbar outlines.

O the black bars fixed across the world, trellising, grating
the world, markings from the alternate, the
un-encountered realm.

My shadow, too, is the grating of my other, my alternate
self.

See, in the shadow of the bare tree on the sun-illuminated
pavement -- the arteries and veins. Appalling.

And there amid the copper-moted glare, in which my
watery gaze dazzles and wavers, there is
something else approaching.

XVI

In the backyard of autumn the apple tree stands in the blue
rains. At night infinitely distant stars flow around it.

The earth – untouched, scarcely visited – flows up through
the tree's black roots and twisted branches.

Yellow apples lie in the grass. How slowly and fragrantly
they are rotting.

For the world has not yet been seen and nothing is what it
seems to be. Always.

Yellow apples rust-spotted, with drops of rain on them, lie
in the wet autumn grass.

The apple seems to be old beneath the names that it has
been given, yet nothing is ever old. These things are
merely waiting.

XVII

Bianca, the scent of summer hay and of thyme, the
uncut fields stifling sweet with the scent of grass,
honey in the trapped sunlight of combs like water
trapped in ice, the wheat grown bright yellow and
on fire in the sunset wind.

A spirit simmers in the fields at noon.

In the mysterious shade, in the dark-colored woods, the
noon is still, almost silent. Yet it is not calm.
O Bianca, your white shadow must pass, and yet your steps
are silent.

It is because you too are of the grass. Spider web roots
tangle in net upon net, black corners of earth where
daylight cannot penetrate. Yet it is there your
passion grows strongest.

And there the soil, in your name and in a likeness the
apparent world takes to be you, breathes its own
sleeping counterpart breath – the inhaled exhaled,
the exhaled breathed in. The earth's builded decay,
year upon year.

Where the sunlight warms the garden's leaves, the green
leaves of the pole beans, the broad sunflower, the
tomato plants, the green entangled flowered vines of
peas, the thicket of the garden in the hot still noon --
so overwhelmingly bright that surely some
inescapable truth is there – we feel your moving,
your unseen presence.

XVIII

A hundred thousand words like autumn leaves have fallen
through the branches of my thoughts, yet where will
I find an image for your hair?

It is like a tangled garden in late August when the constant
heat is audible in the loud cicada's humming. There
is something of this in the warmth and fragrance of
your dark hair.

How like the scent of your skin is the heat of that garden
and that damp earth. Let me put my face close to
your ear. One by one I would follow out all the
threads...over your temple and then your cheek.

Your hair is more beautiful than small webs that hold the
prisms of the rain, your eyes are clearer than the
rain, and your skin tastes as the rain does when the
rain is filled with sunlight.

XIX

O the black routes. On the dark window the snow has
made island-like shapes. Suddenly she's there. In
the body of a young woman.

Drifting, like a bather in black water, she slowly stretches,
slowly rising and turning, like a scarf of pipe smoke
in the air.

Slowly she rises a bit further, fades, lost among the shapes
of snow on the pane.

XX

For a moment I dreamed. I had been reading, but the book bored me, and I dozed off for a second.

During my short time asleep, which seemed very long, as though each second were drawn out longer and longer, like egg white drooling from the edge of its cracked shell, I dreamed a decision had to be made – urgently – by an unspecified party intensely preoccupied with the position of my head.

Whispering voices like the sound of paper rustling or like the silken rush of sand – these were deep in the yolk of my brain. Near-deafness: it was as if two hands covered my ears.

And the matter, the urgent matter, had to do with the word *across*. At what point should it be divided? Yet in the dream, somehow, the word was also my tongue.

The sense of the word and its image in my head had fused with the physical sense of my tongue, which now was a bee buzzing silently. And the question of where the word should be divided applied to it too: just where should my tongue be cut?

By then I had reached a deeper stage of sleep. My head lolled forward but, in a sudden reflex, my neck jerked it back upright, as though with a sudden snap to attention – like someone who catches himself dozing at the wheel, or like someone under whom the hangman's trap door has just opened.

CHANSONS

I

Can you tell me
Where I could find
The shimmering leaves
Of the gold-shining poplar trees?
They and their shadows
Were here
Fluttering and whispering
Only a little while ago.
Perhaps it was just last year.

Could you tell me
Where to look
For the perfect word
Written in the ultimate answer book?
You know,
The one that I'd been looking for
For forever and a day or more.

Could you tell me
Where the sand
Falling down quite near my grasping hand
Could all fall upward through
The wasp-waist
And – you know
I hate to say it – sphincter
Of the hour-glass
And into the day, the life, the time that was?

Or maybe
Where the perfect love –
The one we'd both been looking for,
Not even really looking for
But dreaming of –
Could make its first appearance here,
(Or maybe somewhere fairly near)
Somewhere in the lonely town,
Just ever so lightly touching down.

II

Faces

That I've met
In public places
And faces that meet
My own
In the neon-ravaged street
In the city of the dead
As I enter a small cafe
Or perhaps just a crowded bar
At the very end of the day –
In some
I sometimes see
A friendly appreciative glance
(Or perhaps it happened once
And I've remembered it all this time)
As on the treacherous, winding stairs
Of restaurants and public squares
Our pairs of eyes will meet,
Seeming almost about to say
"You're not so bad yourself"
Or sometimes perhaps instead,
"Oh yeah, I know your kind,
And I'd just as soon
See you dead."
Or, "What are you?" And, "Who are you?"
And then we go on our way
In the city of the dead.

I remember
Once
Somewhere I read
That somewhere in the world

There's someone just right for you.
You know,
Sort of hidden away.
And you've just
Got to trust in fate. How long
Before you find them though's
The tricky part –
The thing that nobody knows,
That no one on earth can say.

III

The evening
Light is lit
In the room
Where we always used to sit,
Just us two
And maybe the dog also
Listening to music
Or perhaps a recorded story.
You always used to
Like it, and I
Always did too,
Though I sometimes pretended not to,
Or at least I wouldn't show it.
(The dog would perk his ears up
Now and then.)
I can't help thinking
Of how long it's been,
And how long it's been
Since we met.
Who would have ever thought?
Where did it all start?
How could it be
So long?
And so long that we've been apart?

I keep on
Thinking the same few thoughts
Over and over, sitting
Here listening
To the old sad song –
Oh yes it's been so long.

I'm really
Quite a broken record
These days,
And you know that it just won't do.
But I still can't help it sometimes
And still think of you.

IV

There where
My love lies
Sleeping
Somewhere inside of me
Somewhere I never see
That's
Where it all
Comes from

Looking and looking
For the mood
Called
Home

V

It's the rain
Falling down
On the lonely old town
(O on the roof tum-tee-tum
It's drumming).
It just keeps coming
Day after day.
Oh what does it ever say?
Something like 'Get some pills Get some pills
Buy a gun Buy a gun
So many so many bills
O when will it ever end?'
I can't help thinking of you.
Pointless, I know,
Because you've gone away,
And this time I know
(And I know that I know)
It's to stay.

O it's the rain
That comes almost every day
Always more and more
Falling and falling down
On the lonely forgotten town.
I heard a song once,
I can't remember it
Very well. It was
Just after I knew you.
Yes, that's how long ago.
At our age, troubles – griefs, really –
Take so very long to tell
And always more and more.

Oh, it's just such a bore.
Pointless, too, because
You've gone away.
And this time I know
(And I know that I know)
It's to stay.

VI

Scotch and soda and I feel
So floating and the world
Goes by –
Just ever so slightly off the ground.
Yes, I'm a little high.
Xanax and Librium
Have stolen my equilibrium
Right right right away.

Oh it just won't do.
Just a very, just a very few
Of your...kisses
I suppose, or whatever,
And these and these
And those and those –
Yellow and green and pink,
I'd throw them all
Right down the sink.

Yes, but what the hell,
Nothing ever goes
The way you want it to.

VII

I remember the sun
And I remember the day.
Even with my head so undone
The memory won't go away.

We went walking downtown,
And I kissed you once.
We walked up and we walked back down,
Almost in a sort of trance.

At least for me that's what it was.
Oh, none of it makes any sense.
Why is it that we always lose
The one we loved the best?

VIII

Listening to Liszt.
The lugubrious gondolier
Pours all his sadness
In my ear.

The rain, the rain
Pours all its melancholy down
On the poor defenseless town.

And there's no help
At all with drink.
I've poured the last down my throat,
The ice cubes in the sink.

Are they melting there?
I guess they must be.
And something wet – ice water?
Is running down my face.

Why am I so
Alone here – in this life,
This world? This town's
Such a lonely place.

IX

Well it was no big deal,
It was just the end of time –
You wouldn't come down
To meet me anymore
At the foot of the stairs.

Well it was no big deal,
It was just the end of the world –
You wouldn't kiss me anymore
Or let me hold you tight.

Well it was no problem really,
It was just the end of my life –
You didn't love me anymore
And that's all there was to that.

There was nothing more to say.
But time and the world and my life –
They went on anyway.
Well, two out of three.

X

It's late
And I'm lying in bed
Once again alone,
And though I'm tired to the bone
I'm having trouble sleeping
Once again.
The bright full moon
Is keeping
The image of your open mouth
Somewhere inside my head.

What can be done?
I'm just so tired.
I get up and walk around
And then I lay back down again.
Outside the wicked moon
Preserves
The image of your long black hair
Somewhere inside my pen.

Perhaps
It makes no sense.
But think –
I'm writing with black ink.
Oh my empty, empty head –
It's just no use.
I turn the light out finally,
Perhaps I'll wake up dead.

XI

Well

It's just a simple thing,
An isolated song
Played, as it were,
On a single string.

Think nothing of it.

XII

O where

Is my love
That I cannot find her?
Where is her voice,
And where her shining face?

Under

The cold ground
Where the tree roots bind her,
Where I feel her touch
In the trickling of the rain.

XIII

Waiting and waiting
For my love
Somewhere

Waiting and waiting
Here O here

XIV

Show me the light
That washes
The old brick wall
On one side of the courtyard
(Outside, the evening's sounds).

Then I will climb
That golden
Chain-link fence of light
On one side of the courtyard.
(Outside, the evening's sounds.)

XV

My

Aren't we sad today,
And the light
Creeps over the page.
Or perhaps it's only
That at my age
I just can't feel entirely alive
Or even just approximately right
So lonely.

Yes

I guess it must be
Just the mood I'm in,
Merely a passing phase
As they always used to say.
Oh well,
I can certainly
Agree with that.
Yes, I can see
It will all go away.

XVI

Like night coming into night,
You come to me waiting here.
Your shadow fuses with my shadow
Your mouth with my mouth,
Your hair around my hair.

Like night coming into day,
You come to my separate space –
Your desire becoming my desire,
Your heartbeat part of mine,
Your skin my skin, and your face my face.

XVII

Midday light
In the curtained room,
And yet the tile floor still keeps
The coolness of the night.

Midday light
Through Venetian blinds,
And in bed she checks her watch
Afraid that she'll be late.

Midday light,
And after, when she's gone,
The scent of her perfume lingers
On the pillowcase and sheet.

Evening light,
And I can't help wonder where she's gone,
The thought of her still present
In the room where I sit alone.

XVIII

She rises from the bed
And stands
At the bathroom mirror there.
Through the window
Come street sounds
And the late night air.

The bathroom light
Snaps off,
And for a moment she disappears.
Then I glimpse her
Mushroom pale
In bluish moonlight
As she makes her way down the stairs.

Eventually
She's back
With a tray of toast,
Some strawberry jam, and tea.
Actually
The tea's for her,
But there's sweet dark coffee for me.

XIX

It's been so long
Since I've been in love,
That I almost can't remember
The feelings it's made of.

It's been so long
Since I've had someone to kiss.
Is it more like that?
Or is it more like this?

It's been so long
Since I've had someone in bed.
I lie awake at night
And think of it instead.

O what a bore it is
When you can't find anyone,
But you just have to continue
Living every day alone.

XX

Well it was just the way
They say and who
Could have thought it anyway,
That I would miss her so?

That evening in her apartment,
And her strange perfume
With its dark nostalgic scent,
Curtains drawn in her room,

The last of the evening sun
Bleeding out far in the west –
And I lay with my precious one,
My head upon her breast.

XXI

The unspoken law
Hidden somewhere
Deep among bright autumn trees
Where light is darkened in leaves,

The unspoken rule
At the sharp edge of the blinds
That cast bars of light, bars of shade,
Prison stripes on the bed unmade.

The long strict shadows that cut
Up the squares of the sidewalk
Falling away from every street sign
In the dusty afternoon,

Each of these things
Leaves its own special mark
On the two of us here,
On the world we try to share,

On my hand tracing your eyebrow,
On your hand combing your thick black hair.

XXII

Eternal streaming
Of the brilliant light
Outside
But in this shuttered room
We two take shelter
Perhaps for just a little bit
And hide
In the ochre gloom.

Green water burns
And bright sand,
The high sun punishing the beach
Which glares back
To the day,
The shimmering whiteness turning black
Unless you look away.

Odor of crushed anise
Fills the Calabrian heat.
Over ninety degrees in the shade,
And yet
The life, the love,
The world the two of us have made
Is perfect now,
Incomparable and sweet.

XXIII

See, they are absent –
All the shadows
That throng in the twilight room.
They are no longer your past lovers,
They are merely gods.

How many restless forms,
Vague and yet so clear,
Unsettle your still sleep
Which by its very stillness
I know is imageless and deep.

Shadows and dim radiance
Of ochre and dark gold
Surround your untroubled face.
Venetian blinds make light
A ladder of gold shrapnel,
Bright shards in the body of space.

O tell me to what
And to where
I would climb
Could I somehow ascend,
Rung by rung,
That weightless and radiant stair,
Climbing up one by one
Into that other realm,
Absent, yet present here
Before my unwearied eye,
Somehow known by mere contemplation.

XXIV

Sleeping alone
And dreaming alone,
Always dreaming of one thing,
And I guess it must be of you.

Waking alone,
And having coffee too,
Always thinking one thing.
I guess just some thought of you.

Walking down for the news,
Going out at night,
Always the same thing happens –
Someone asks me for a light,

I see the poplar trees in rows –
But really I'm
Thinking of something else.
I guess it must be of you.

XXV

To be alone with her
In the dim shuttered room,
Sleeping side by side
The beach down past the walkway
And the highway, too, nearby;

To be alone with her,
Dreaming there side by side,
Breathing together, almost –
Light-ladders lead up the wall;

To be alone with her
While being together, too;
I still remember everything –
The warm still air (no air-conditioning)
Sea salt, and bars of light.

XXVI

Along the sidewalk
Where the shadows move,
As we walk in the sun
As we walk in the moon,

Two other lovers,
Where the shadows move,
Are so far ahead of us there,
And they wait for us in the moon.

XXVII

Night comes around,
And the day goes down.
It goes down in the west
Where my love lies.

Night comes in,
And the stars come out,
Scattered from the east
And over to the west
Where my love lies.

Night comes down,
And my sadness returns,
Reaching far into my heart
Where my love lies.

XXVIII

Red sun at morning
Sailor take warning,
Bright sun above
Illuminate one I love.

Red sun at night
Sailor's deep delight,
Silver moon above
Give dreams to the one I love.

XXIX

It was always very clear
Right from the start
That we two would draw near
Only to have to part.

It was always unmistakable
That's how the story would go –
An old old story, I know.
I won't say I told you so.

It was always fairly evident
What we were headed toward.
But beginnings, you know, are easy.
It's endings that are hard.

XXX

A day of sunshine
For a change.
It was so beautiful – the sunlight
Falling on that corner of the wall
Across the street.

A day of clear sky
And no clouds,
And those there were
Were floating lily pads in the air
Or banks of radiant snow and ice.

A day when everything
Was right,
Except that it had been
So long since I had seen your face
Or touched your skin
Or heard your voice.

XXXI

I can't imagine why
I love you like I do;
It must be I don't try
To know the reason.

All my little ways
Are hidden in the dark;
It's just the price one pays,
I guess, for such an obsession.

No, don't give me back
My eyes. I must stay blind.
Only in the dark
Will I find what I need to find.

XXXII

To be alone with you
In the room shut from day,
Dreaming side by side
As light slowly passes away,
(I still remember everything)
Until finally it's evening.

To be alone with you
In the room filled with night,
Sleeping side by side
As two separate dreams unite,
(I can't remember everything)
And then suddenly it's morning.

XXXIII

It weeps in my heart
As it rains on the town.
What sorrow or pain
Do I hear in the falling rain?

It falls on the roofs,
And then on the glossy street –
Low clouds and wet roofs,
Gray sky and black street.

Lights come on slowly,
And still the rain comes down.
Blue lights and gray lights
Are streaked on the rain-wet town.

Only now do I know
I have lost the one I love.
Something inside me weeps
For the thing I can never have.

It weeps in my heart
As it rains on the town,
The sorrow and the pain
I hear in the falling rain.

XXXIV

One of these days
You'll think of me,
And then you'll wonder why.
Oh yes you will.
Just wait and see.

One of these days
I'll have to laugh
At the sight of us two
Standing there
In that old photograph.

One of these days
I'll think of you
And maybe just right then –
You never know –
You'll think of me too.

Was it really me?
Was it really you?
Oh it was all so long ago.
How did we ever get into it all?
But then, how could we know?

XXXV

Think nothing of it
When you hear the wind repeat
My name to you at night,
When you're lying there with someone
And that someone isn't me.

Think nothing of it
When you hear the rain reiterate
My tears on the windowpane,
When you're having a drink with someone
And that someone isn't me.

Think nothing of it
When you see me on the street.
Forget that we ever met.
When you're walking by with someone,
Keep walking right on by.

XXXVI

I remember once
How the two of us spent
The autumn afternoon,
Outside just gray trees and rain
And the rain on the windowpane.

The fireplace worked,
And so we made a fire
That autumn afternoon.
How clearly I recall
How our shadows looked on the wall.

And I remember too –
It was long ago and yet
The entire afternoon
Is so present for me still –
The fire light on your breasts, cold rain on the windowsill.

XXXVII

O I don't know
Why the light falls on the carpet
And ruler-edges down the wall
Just that way.
A golden ruler it is, I guess.
I think I saw it there that way
The other day.
But who can say?

I really couldn't guess
Why the sun
Goes from the east
And over to the west.
It just does it, I suppose.
It must be an ingrained habit
Or one of those
Laws of nature
That I've heard about.

Another one is this:
You love what you can't have,
Or if you can
You give it up,
Only later to discover
It was what you really wanted after all.
But by then, it's over.

XXXVIII

So many loves
Dead in your slender arms,
An empty space
Crossed with these shadows.

So many dead loves
Faded as the night is;
Your sleeping face is
Striped with these shadows.

What prisoners
Held behind those bars
Awake and stir there, moving
In the passions of your sleep?

XXXIX

Well it's such a lonely town,
And I really have to admit
I was getting pretty crazy.
I was really desperate.

Well it's such a stupid thing –
I was really going mad.
I was getting just so lonely,
I took out a personals add (don't laugh).

Yes it's a lonely old town,
Just as the old song says
(They must have been thinking of this one).
I keep saying the words as it plays.

XL

We went out for a walk
One day,
The two of us.
We didn't have that much to say
I didn't really
Really want to talk that much anyway.
But that's just me

We went out for a stroll
Just the other day,
The two of us.
The wind blew all the leaves away.
I didn't really
Really want them all anyway.
But that's just me.

We went out on a date
A while back,
(The other day)
The two of us.
You know it would be just my luck,
It got too late
To say it all
Or even half of what I wanted to.
Now it will all just have to wait.
But that's just me.

XLI

We went out for a walk
The other night
It was just us two
The moon was very bright
And the clouds were blue

We walked up
And we walked down
And really all around
And really really all around.

The moon was blue
And the sky was bright.
It was a beautiful
Cold September night

For the two of us.

XLII

Walking along in thought
And going down through the square
And two pigeons fluttering up
Right up into the air,
Just as I passed by,
Away into the blue September sky.

We were talking there one time,
And it was just a day
Like all the other days,
Just as the world passed by
And the late September day
Faded to the blue of the evening sky.

XLIII

Did I love
Her madly?
I did, and I really did.
She loved me
Madly too.
Or at least that's what she said.

But it's all
So funny.
In the end it all comes apart.
And at last
There's only you,
Alone with your remorseless heart.

XLIV

Well it was
Just so much,
And yet it was
Only the remembrance of your touch.

And it was
So unreal,
You know, and really
Almost more than I could stand to feel.

In what sense
Is it really true
That it was me
And that it was really you?

Well who can say
Which of us
Knew which of us
On that much-recollected day?

XLV

Between day and dream
In the off-white room
Stained with ochre shadows
Crossed with dusty triangles
Of honey-colored light

It streams through tinted blinds
Between day and dream
Here on an open bed
In the off-white room
That rests on wooden floorboards
Between day and dream

Across from a wooden door
We lie here side by side
And our shadows lie here too
Waiting for gradual night
To fill the off-white room
With neither day nor dreams

XLVI

My friends all say to me
One day they'll get away.
O but I don't know,
Who can say which way,
Which way the wind will blow?

The birds all say to me
One day I'll get away.
O how can they know –
Nothing but bird brains anyway –
Which way the wind will blow?

Leaves falling in the breeze
And the grass at my feet
Growing up right through the concrete
Say to me it will all just blow away.
O but I don't know, who can say
Which way the wind will blow?

XLVII

I went out to a party.
It was just the other night.
Everybody having a good time.
(Well one couple
Got into quite a fight.)

O it was all just fantastic.
It was great.
I hope we do it again sometime.
I just can't wait.

XLVIII

The other night
(I remember it so well)
It was just the two of us.
And you know they always say
How every night will turn to day.
O but what the hell.

The other night
(I still can see it very clear)
It was just the two of us.
You put your lips close to my ear.
O how long we've all been dead.
But every night must turn to day,
I've often heard it said.

The other night
(I still can feel it so, so much)
It was just the two of us.
I feel the after-feeling of your touch.
Still, they always say
How nothing ever goes the way you want it to.
How long we've all been dead.
O but I do miss you so.

XLIX

We never slept together.
Probably we never will.
And yet I still remember,
I can see it still
Although it's been a very long time.

The smoky dimness of the bar.
So many little things
Grow very clear.
I see myself there in the mirror.
It's been a very long time.
I saw you there too my dear –

The two of us together,
You moved a little closer...
When was that?
O it was one day...
Whenever.

And I can still remember,
I feel you near me still.
What were you saying to me,
There in the darkness,
Just us two?

I still can hear your whisper.
What were you whispering?
Feel your lips
Close to my ear,
And we were drunk – yes,
Both of us – alcohol...
It was so mysterious.

For ten minutes I was happy,
Almost delirious.
It's so funny
How some things happen,
And so strange.
I had to write this song.
Although I know it's been so long.

L

The leaves fall
Through my open hands
Even as I blow
A plume of breath smoke
Into the clear cold sky.
So blue the day,
Yet as I stand or walk
The earth is moving quickly
Into night –
Where does all
Our time go
In the world, stand or sit,
Be silent, sing or talk,
It hardly matters how or what
You do.

LI

In the October afternoon
With dead leaves blowing
In littered piles here and there,
The dusty square
Is empty
And the wind is cold.
The bright blue sky
Is full of white clouds moving
Quickly by;
The day is sunny, clear,
And every tree
Whose leaves have not yet fallen
-- they rustle wind-flaked and parchment sere –
Is a radiant translucent gold.

The houses standing
Around and office
Buildings too
Seem filled with something
Unknown – is it old, or new?
Mysterious,
The nature of our human life
In time. I feel it
In my body, in my thought;
Breath smoke goes up and pitiless
Exultant light –
Seeing it on pavement,
Tiles, steel and concrete,
The mere and single sight
Of light itself,
Is the sum total of my insight.

I wonder time
And time again
If there's any point in going on.
My boredom,
And yet more than that my fear,
Grows greater every day.
The world is beautiful to see
But terrible to live in.
The step beyond is terrible as well.
The burning trees cry out, each by itself
In its own cage of beauty,
Into the blue and empty sky,
Into the cold October air.

AFTER HUNDERTWASSER

Prelude

Overcast Berlin, city of clouds and spies

Through the coded streets, someone is walking

Sunset again, once again

Whatever happens, the devastated world sinks back into
twilight

And now I feel the holy isolation of the earth

You see the masters of commodity, here, and there

An enormous eye watches all the store contains

And now, still, the ear listens

And now a different eye, the eye of the wanderer, sees

Many Transparent Heads

In the red window –
which streams with blurry streaks of rain –
so many transparent heads,
jostling each other
and yet weightless, they are
like a clutch of party balloons as they
crowd into a scaffold of gridded space.

Here,
since the moment of reflection
might easily last too long,
in the instant of a glance –
given to the viewer as though in confidence –
they seem agitated,
as though by a mere breath,
wavering together like reeds.
Perhaps they are whispering.

The room – surprisingly,
it is not a party –
is brightly lit and white, like a lab,
and though it is crowded
it seems eerily vacant.

The red
substance
streaming down the pane
is an unappealing pink,
like the blood that runs to the corner of a platter.
With its long theatrical streaks
it is like a clown's makeup.
Certainly it isn't really blood.

You think of
the imperfections of the world,
the laughable imperatives of money.
And then a joke told at a party
is like the sound
of data being linked to other data,
which is also the sound
of a cat entering the room
and then leaving.

Outside, far outside,
the black leaves
on the moonlit trees
are fluttering in the wind.

Is there any other sound?
Is the window pane trembling slightly?
And now you wonder,
on which side are the faces?

For an instant
you realize
that the pane will break
at any moment.
Even now it is threatening to crack.

This moment,
postponed indefinitely,
is impending
like a hanging water-bead.
And in a sense, it is the picture.

Like a water-bead ready to fall
but not quite fallen,
the painting is, in some sense,

transparent, even luminous,
like the window which it represents, the window
in which I can discern
streaks of light at the periphery,
while the dark and crowded center comes forward
in a sinister convex inspiration
and expansion.

Suddenly, enthralled,
I imagine that I can touch it.
It looks so active and living,
a membrane more than a window,
a living transparency,
like a cornea.

Or perhaps
it is the walls
of an artery
or of the pericardium itself,
streaming with – bathed in –
the dark enigma.

And yet still it's so clearly
nothing more than a face,
albeit a single face
composed of numerous faces.
And you feel now that "outside"
is always somehow a problem,
persistent, difficult not to consider.

Evidently,
the gathering must continue.
And there are even suggestions,
painted rumors as it were,
that the crowd is silently increasing.

The Invasion

In this painting
the surface is crowded, congested
with tight rows of crimson flags,
or edges and narrow strips of red brick
with blue streamers,
or with off-white rags of apparent solidity
that look like articles of clothing.
Yet one feels, looking at all of it,
that only one surface is covered
and that other surfaces lie some ways beneath,
and these address us with great persistence.

Then there are those things
which look like partitions or walls.
Here and there, there are gaps,
empty spaces left out of account, holding things apart.
These are the invisible parts
of the picture.

Later,
walking outside in the blue day,
the traffic noise
seems to press in upon us.
We know then, somehow,
that the structures we hear and see
are as it were
the compressed remains of other things,
other intentions which can only be guessed at.

House of Arcades and Yellow Tower

The spider hidden under the horizon
so encrusted with black
casts up its threads -- fine and red,
like the blood vessels in an eye, light-threads
as precise as cobwebs, complex
as the shatters in a smashed windshield;
these vein themselves through the wavering tide of
sunset
that streams out around the tilting city
listing steeply away from the observer.

In the sundown and coming darkness
the light, the air itself,
is bronzed, possessed of secret depths
so deeply allied to gold
and the refinements of gold
they are like a tide of amber,
though, here and there, a remnant
of the daylight sky
lingers in turquoise;
near the horizon one can see
suffusions of the mystical, talismanic sea of green.

Meanwhile the enigmatic threads
gather the city and hold it,
like a crossword puzzle, in place.

They are of indigo, crimson, or of no color at all,
tying the grids, the hidden synapses
darkly together.

Still there are pathways,
forgotten by some,
by a few unexpectedly recalled – corridors
that move you like a bead along an abacus
toward the catacombs you have heard of,
where light and the actual sun are buried,
where the sun's true cross –
always visible at sunset as it intersects the earth –
is hidden beneath the rubble of days;
there where the queen of light
lies encircled in an amphitheater of cells,
a memorial hive to her king,
where the martyred saints of the honeycomb's radiance
have laid down their darkness in distinguished rows.

And yet for all of the overheard rumors,
few will ever arrive there.

Instead you will be drawn swiftly out
along the surface routes,
lit with pink light and indigo, with orange and mauve,
the bright, denatured, time-altering lights.

And at length you may realize that you're entirely lost.

Yes, the city has a singular defect –
although a network, it is one of shattered mirrors
or of partially reflective, but ravaged surfaces.
Perhaps it's like tin-foil crumpled to a ball
inside of someone's fist,
then unfolded and smoothed out,
as well as might be, to look almost like new.

Night Chant in Time of Drought

The sounds, the calling,
Move between the stirring of the trees and of the grass.
Is it the wind?
Or the sounds of the trilling crickets and the call of the
tree frogs?

I feel the manic fall of night through space and time.
Yet still, the breeze still rises.

A wind, but a dry wind,
Moves through the brush, swaying the dark umbels of
the night-blue trees.

The bayberry bushes shiver and hiss –
The leaves of the oak trees flutter and flicker
In the dry but increasing storm.

Unlimited, unhampered now, renewed,
The night is a sea of correspondences –
Of choruses, responses, antiphons.

The whole round grain of wheat, the earth itself,
The breaking germ of life, the gold green seed –

lives now, poised,
Awakened by the unexhausted surge
Of creation and destruction, the rising strong dry wind.

The waters in the parching fields rise now,
The hundred waters and the reign of peace
Now rise within the brimmed cup of the field.

The green grass wakes to feel the summer, its wind, its
gathering power – it is
A giant, a transparent form, who leans
Down poised amid the turning constellations,
Bending low, and breathes out "haaah," and sings and
calls.

Listen: the grass, the awakened, moves and sings –
The crickets are its answering voice.
The sky of midnight blue bends down –
The cobalt basin of the stars,
The overflowing font of stars, spills over and spills down.
The waters of creation roll out through the valley,
through the dry creek beds.

The waiting fields, the turning night,
The earthly and originating dark embrace.
The night is like a tent curved round,
Including all the stars, the moon, the clouds, the fields
and hills.

The Beard is the Grass of the Bald

Sun

Bole

Roots

Rings of the tree

lines in the palm of the hand

Leaves of the tree

Breathing-seeing skin

Roots of the tree

Mouth-stomach-bones

The grass grows from between my fingers as I look up at
the sky

Quickly and slowly it grows and I feel it tickling my palms,
the delicate webbed spaces between my fingers and
the backs of my hands

I feel the grass tingling awake, opening like a starfish, like
a sea anemone, unfolding like paper flowers in a
bowl of water

I roll on my stomach and stretch out more widely,
covering more of the field with my arms and legs

The leaves of the grass open outward like eyes opening
beneath my two hands like a book of infinite pages,
page after page

The tiny grass blades spreading outward are like ripples
on the surface of a pond

My eyes close and I am the stone dropped in, I sink into the
center of the well which dilates around me
Turning over slowly I sink downward still further, adrift on
my back
Ripples ripple outward over my sleeping face and the
sun of my forehead, my eyes are closed but I feel
everything widening
Concentric circles of green and of sunlight, I feel the
warmth more deeply now and the circles reach
outward over the green pond of the field
Spreading outward like light above my face are the first
wavering rings of a tree
Minutest speech, the babble of roots and of stems, I can
hear it

Leaves covering the surface of sky roots webbing the
bed of the well long grasses and tendrils of weeds
fill up the bell of the water bead
Silence and rapt spells chanted of green prophecy of
sunlight water and grains of black dirt
Dim and green events in the realms of the dead the
underground kingdom

But then in the human script, here in the twilight world, I
try out my voice again
Yet my face is the rings of a tree the wood grain blond in
the sunlight

My face is the rings of a tree
my eyes the opening knots
Like the eyes in a birch's trunk

Like the green paisley drops in a Luna moth's wing

My eyes are opening in the knots of the wood

I pass through among the living

I open my eyes in the underworld

I open my eyes inside the knots of the wood grain

Now my spread-out hands where the grass had grown

through them are moving like parts of a web

My whole body stretched prone is dissolved in green water

It is only a pulse that beats under the chest of the ground

Under the eyelid of earth the water's pupil dilates around
me and I float in the circles of tree rings as though in
a spider web

My hair my hands my face are dead leaves afloat on the
surface are brown dry moth wing husks hanging in a
web

Slowly I feel the green wetness of light as a warmth
flowing over my face

The grass coalesces closing its book beneath my hands it
imprints my fingertips

There is a green tongue in my mouth

Sun

rings of tree

Lines in the palm of the hand

Bole

leaves of tree

Breathing-seeing skin

Roots of the tree

Mouth-stomach-bones

Seeing-breathing skin
Skin of seeing breath

Always
Always and everywhere
Sun-sweat
Rain-light

Rain scent
Light-wind

Memoire

When I was a boy
Father would take me evenings
To the cottage in the spring
To get ready for
Summer we worked on the boat
The boathouse was built
Into the cottage
Birds in the boathouse
Swallows or starlings were they

When I was a boy
Father would take me evenings
To the cottage in the bird
To get ready for summer
We worked on the moon
The moon-house was built
Into the cottage

Wind in the moon-house

Black-eyed susans
Or starlings were they

Nightmares

I

One night when I had gone to bed,
In January when the snow
Was heavy on the ground outside
And ice made daggers from the eaves
And the moon was bright and pocky white,
I huddled underneath the quilt
And blankets and the winter sheets,
The weight of bedclothes heavy
As the deep snow on the ground outside
For the roots of the covered grass
And their secret hidden life
And just as intimate, just as warm.
Slowly I relaxed. The warmth increased.
I stretched my legs, extending them
All the way down to the depths of the bed
Like tree roots or potato eyes,
And as I nearly slept I felt
A spreading flush, a urine-like warmth
But from a source inside my bones
And then a taut awareness of my skin,
A crinkling numbness, stiff, mask-like,
Like white ash-wrappings flaking off
The charcoal-glowing heart of the log.
It was as though my legs and hips,
My stomach, even my arms and chest,
Were stiffening and throbbing,
Stretching, blossoming,
Diffused in warmth and flaking off,
Basking awakened, slumbering alert –
A breathing tension opening

Into a listening expectant strength
Perhaps of bear or fox or possum,
Who woke in me and moved through me
In random stirring awake sensations,
Holding to me, watching me.
After a while I partially awoke.
I moved my legs: the creatures drew
Away and went back to the dark.

II

The next day I remembered nothing,
Naturally, and went about my business.
But when I went to sleep that night
I had a dream: I lay in darkness
In a hollowed-out deep place.
My mind in sleep was altered,
Slowed, turned inward on itself
Like the scrolling of a fiddlehead fern.
My body breathed more amply and
More slowly. I descended further
And curled around the center of my form,
Which was my stomach and my hips.
With my two hands before my face
I was a fetus or a buried seed,
A bear holed up in its winter den.
Heavily burdened with peculiar sleep
I fell inward through the deep pool
That was myself, and ages settled
Over me as I fell and fell.
I knew my sleep was longer than
A human night, a winter age
Would have to pass before I woke –
Depths of snow and depths of time,
Each instant, each snow crystal

Deepening my solitude,
Crystal on crystal, point on point
Of interlocking snow and night,
Multiplying dimensions piling up
Of time and self. I was a wave
That something else was moving through.
The small dark place was very small
Yet without boundaries, infinite;
And it was quiet, warm, and still.
I was alone. There was no I.
And there were throngs and throngs with me –
Animals, people – I couldn't tell:
Eyes and faces, breathing and
Heartbeats and voices crowding into me,
Passing through me, passing out of me,
Passing, passing in wave on wave,
Silently, through the winter night.

III

Bear of sleep and fox of sleep,
Fox of dream and dreaming fox –
The stars move round the wide, wind-crossed,
Dark empty skull of sky and night.
I enter the narrow skull of fox.
The stars burn in his sleeping eye.
The night moves through his mind. He dreams.
I disappear like a point of light
Inside the pupil of his eye
And travel down the skein of nerves
And through the rivers of the blood
And through the caverns of the heart
And lose myself, and lose the world,
Inside the vaporous breath of fox.
There is a difference: suddenly

I feel the slightest sound. The lack of sound
Is sound itself. The trembling
Of the smallest barb or burr or leaf
And I become the burr or leaf.
My being is a tympanum
Where night's small music taps and taps –
Dry leaves and twigs, dry grass or vole
Or mouse or rabbit – anything
That runs and bleeds and I become
The scent that throbs inside my nostrils.
The night is infinite and cold.
I close my eyes and dream and wait.

IV

Now possum sleep and possum death – I sleep
More lightly and more rigidly,
My bleached, albino death's head
Watchful from the corner of its eye,
And all the eyes within me watch.
My limbs themselves are made of eyes
And tingling hairs perfect my sight
And carry it inward into movement,
Into feeling and self-feeling.
I feel the night around me, watchful, tense.
I am a lens instantly focusing
Through hearing, touch, expectancy.
I still can see the copper moon --
Late August's -- in my sleeping eye.
I wandered lost beneath it once
Across the city streets, back yards,
Paused in the middle of the sidewalk,
Poised, my mouth slightly agape,
My needle teeth just visible,
As though I were about to cough, or laugh,

Or possibly about to speak.
I stood there frozen, silent, hunched,
Seeming paralyzed, while the fool,
The idiot, the human – an old man –
Poked me with a stick, curious,
And nudged me with his foot.
The grass nearby had evil smells
And bitter tastes – numbness
And nauseating dizziness
Went through me, through my mouth
And through my stomach and my throat.
Then when the human went away
I ran back to the nearest woods.
Along the railroad track, at the edge of town,
The moon was huge above me
As I wandered through the August night.
The moon was copper in my eyes.
My eyes were amber and red fire.
My skin was like the tense night air,
My hearing was its tiny sounds.
So with my death's head, bleached-looking, white,
With padded feet upon soft earth,
I was alive, a living skull.
I traveled on and on and on
Deeper and deeper through night woods,
Tense and listening, hearing, seeing,
Unnoticed, on the surface of the earth.

V

That morning at about five o'clock
I was awakened by a sound.
Sitting up, staring – my head still fogged –
I felt strange eyes around me
Watching and strange ears listening.
Everything I did was seen and heard.
Then in the dark I saw dim shapes
That settled into desk and chair.
And then I heard faint sounds nearby
Like stealthy footsteps on the floor.
And then I realized – it was
The snap of windows settling,
The radiator's ping and knock,
The creak of floorboards in a draft.

The Sea at Noon

The scree toward cliff's edge, although loose, yet held
My foot, supported by loose clay and sand –
The drop ten yards with outcroppings of rock
That ended in the sparkling blue-green water.

The day was bright with sharp breeze from the west.
The sun was high; a gull turned in the wind
And the earth's slight convex arc dipped, curved away.
The marshaled waves receded to the edge

As my sight scanned that glittering expanse
Where there was just the sleeping prodigal –
And the sun's glare soldering the waves, the sparks
Of water flaking, fleeing toward the edge,

The floor of molten glass, a million points
Of light, the burning particles of day,
The phosphorescence of the fallen sea,
The turning sea glossed with the fallen light.

Remembrance

Loveliest of winds for me,
The northeast blows, promising
Fiery suns and a safe passage
To all sailors. But go now
And with me greet
The beautiful Garonne
And the gardens of Bordeaux
There where the pathway
Narrows close to the sharp bank
And the stream falls far into the river,
While above it the noble pair of oaks looks down
And the silvery white poplars.

How well it all comes back to me,
the broad tops of the elm trees
bending over the mill
with yet a fig tree growing in the courtyard.
And there on feast days
the brown skinned women
walk the silk smooth lane,
and toward the time of March
when night and day are equal
over the long drawn paths
heavy with the gold of dreams
there drifts a lulling breeze.

But someone reach to me
One of the fragrant drafts,
A cupful of darkened light,
So that I might have rest, for sweet
Would be the slumber in this shade.
Nor is it good to be

Soulless from mortal thoughts, but yet
Conversation is good and to tell
The heart's intent, to hear of the days of love,
Of deeds and of what became.

And yet where are the friends? where Bellarmin
And his companion? Many grow
Fearful approaching the source;
And surely riches begin at sea.
They as the painters
Bring together the beauties of earth
Nor turn aside from the wings of strife
Nor to live years alone under a leafless mast,
Where the festival days of the city never
Shine through the nights,
Nor comes the music of strings nor the native dance.

But they are all gone now,
The men, far to the Indies,
From that windblown reach of land
And the vineyard hills from where
The Dordogne comes down
And with the majesty of the Garonne
The two together broaden to a sea.
And yet the sea both gives and takes away remembrance.
Love too lifts up its eyes unceasing.
Yet what remains, the poets have in their keeping.

(Holderlin, "Andenken")

From the Heights of Montserrat

All must return to the original fire
To the storm of flames
Thus Heraclitus spoke
The rising and setting of man lucid, hard.
-- You must see the ebb and flow
Of contemptible passions
-- You shall accept the element of wet as one loves
The mother who engendered us.
--Men and women, you are pledged
To the fire of an immaterial lava
Here and there weightless, yet crushing

Ever mortal
Ever living
Loving only what will come.

Always plunged in the volcanoes of life and of death.

And Paracelsus: with both hands resting
On the sword of wisdom,
Intimate with the stones and with the stars
Fascinated with the caverns of man himself,
The womb of the universe.

And you Zarathustra, the eye of light,
At the center of the world terrible and joyous,
You I salute from the heights
Of Montserrat.

(Georges Bataille)

Where

I came
From the edge
Of the earth
Where the ebb tide of sunset
On the beach of the sky,
Where the leavings of light,
Barely touch the dark and the damp
Of the low stone walls,
The opened crust of the fields,
The mounds of low graves,
The shadow-rows of the numerous buildings
And the numbered houses that stand
As though in the very surf of light,
At the fiery, dissolving edge
Of darkness rapidly arriving.

I came
As though on a beam of glare,
My feet touching
The open furrows of the tilled lands,
My hands gathering
Bright leaves to scatter outward
Over the fields
In flight still beneath me,
My eyes opening
In the green of the water
Like the golden eye
Of a fish
As I dived inward still
To reach
My two hands

Toward the deepest throats of the earth,
Beneath dark waves
And the infinite streamings.

Farther and deeper within –
Crystal of transformation
Where light need not step
Through the many halls of color,
Where earth has its own
Secrecy, power
Its unknown dominion, the silent,
Gathering land.

What
Can I take back
Now from my sojourn
And deadly
Experiment? Feathery grasses
From the meadow,
Rocks from the bottom of the stream? –
The mud on my hands
From the shore, mushrooms –
Small, pale, smelling of earth –
From the cool and shadowy maple wood?

Creatures of the Calm: A Masque

Characters

Charles Darwin – as an old man

The Ancient Mariner – an old sailor, the captain of a ship

First Sailor

Second Sailor

Third Sailor – the eldest and the ship's navigator

The Albatross – a great bird, yet a spirit too.

Death-in-Life

and -- two witches

Life-in-Death

Three Shadow Players -- appearing behind an illuminated scrim or veil.

[The stage is divided roughly in half: one side is a Victorian study, the other side an old sailing vessel.]

SCENE 1

[A Victorian study crammed with as many clocks, chronometers, and other instruments of time measurement as possible. There is also a video camera trained on DARWIN and several monitors which display his image.]

[Lights up. Darwin.]

DARWIN

I was Darwin. I stood on the deck of Her Majesty's Ship Beagle, the ruins of Europe behind me. Of course, I did not know they were ruins. I was 23. I was going to be a minister, to take Holy Orders in the Church of England, amid the ruins of Europe, which I did not know to be such, in the Year of Our Lord Eighteen Hundred and Thirty One.

[Takes up book.]

Journal Entry: After having twice been driven back by heavy south-western gales, Her Majesty's Ship Beagle, sailed from Devonshire on the 27th of December. Our purpose was to explore the coasts of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego and to carry a chain of chronometric measurements around the world.

Our Captain was Robert Fitz Roy, Royal Navy. He was my ideal of a perfect gentleman, to the manner born, and born to command -- brilliant, energetic, and so handsome, though a small man. He actually was the nephew of Castlereagh. I saw him have three sailors flogged on deck our first week out. I remember the sound of the cat-a-nine-tails and what it looked like afterward, the gouts of blood.

I never did get used to the sea. Lord, how I was seasick the whole time.

[Takes up book.]

Journal entry: march 18th. In the sea around Tierra del Fuego, I have seen narrow lines of water of a bright red

color from the number of crustacea, which somewhat resemble in form large prawns.

But in reality, it was a sea of blood, although I did not know that at the time. I was 23.

[BLACK OUT.]

[Lights up. The ship. The ANCIENT MARINER, writing in log.]

ANCIENT MARINER

The members of my crew are all dead. The ship lies becalmed. I don't know where we are. Our journey began well enough. Then a terrific gale blew us southward far from our intended course.

[Enter THREE SAILORS.] (a storm; fast-paced and confused)

ANCIENT MARINER

Reef the main sail. Helmsman are you asleep?

FIRST SAILOR

No sir, captain.

THIRD SAILOR

The gallant sail captain.

ANCIENT MARINER

It will do for now. Look to that loose line there.

FIRST SAILOR

We're drowned surely.

SECOND SAILOR

I've never seen such wind.

THIRD SAILOR

No more of that.

ANCIENT MARINER

Loose the gallant sail.

SECOND SAILOR

Where are we?

THIRD SAILOR

We take water sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

Helmsman –

FIRST SAILOR

I CAN'T HEAR CAPTAIN, SIR, WIND –

SECOND SAILOR

THE WIND IS LIKE FIRE.

THIRD SAILOR

THE SEA IS HILLS OF WAVES. CAPTAIN –

ANCIENT MARINER

ENOUGH OF THAT CHATTER! ARE YOU SAILORS?
PIGS, A CREW OF PIGS I HAVE, I'D BE BETTER
OFF –

FIRST SAILOR
SIR, WHAT COURSE?

ANCIENT MARINER
STEADY HELMSMAN. HELP HIM WITH THAT SAIL.
LOOK-OUT, WHAT SAY YOU UP THERE?

SECOND SAILOR
The sea is mountains of ice, black water so far beneath –

ANCIENT MARINER
WHAT'S THAT?

FIRST SAILOR
THE WIND SIR –

ANCIENT MARINER
I CAN'T HEAR!

THIRD SAILOR
The rude surge –

SECOND SAILOR
WE'RE DROWNED SURELY!

FIRST SAILOR
Damn me that I ever set foot on this deck!

ANCIENT MARINER
NO! (PAUSE) But now it grows calm....

THIRD SAILOR
Calm.... calm...calm....Thank god.

SECOND SAILOR
Where are we?

THIRD SAILOR

I don't know.

FIRST SAILOR

Where are we sir?

ANCIENT MARINER

Hush that chatter. It's calm –

SAILOR ONE

What sea is this?

SAILOR TWO

Dust, white dust all over me. You too. Oh I'm so cold now.

SAILOR ONE

I'm freezing.

SAILOR TWO

Captain, captain we're dying of cold now, captain.

SAILOR ONE

We're freezing Captain.

SAILOR THREE

White dust over everything now. It's snow. Strange snow.

ANCIENT MARINER

This is not the sea. This is the moon. Navigator, where are we?

SAILOR THREE/NAVIGATOR

On the moon they say there is a place called the Sea of Fertility. Full of white dust. This must be it. We're on the moon, Captain.

ANCIENT MARINER

Mountains of green ice as high as the mast. Helmsman,
look to that ice flow to port.

SAILOR TWO

Yes sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

I've never seen such ice. There's a green light in it. Like an
emerald.

SAILOR ONE

This can't be the moon that we're on.

SAILOR TWO

Who knows?

ANCIENT MARINER

The water's like a surface of stone. Black stone.

SAILOR ONE

Captain where are we?

SAILOR THREE

We should turn back.

MARINER

There is no turning back. How did we even get here?

SAILOR THREE

I don't know.

FIRST SAILOR

He's mad.

SECOND SAILOR

The sea is so bright with the moon.

FIRST SAILOR

The sea is the moon turned into water.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

It's just like they always said. If you go far enough, you slip off the edge of the world, and then you're lost there in the emptiness, or you'll fall into the pit of hell, or into the jaws of the monster that lies on the other side.

FIRST SAILOR

That's where he belongs, in the pit of hell. Never any rest.

ANCIENT MARINER

Navigator. Are you deaf?

NAVIGATOR

I'm here captain.

ANCIENT MARINER

Where is here?

THIRD SAILOR

Sir, we are in uncharted regions. These stars are unknown to me. But it may be we are not far from the line of the equator. Some of my readings indicate this. Others do not.

ANCIENT MARINER

Then why would it be so cold?

THIRD SAILOR

I don't know sir. I do know, Captain, that the men are afraid.

ANCIENT MARINER

They're young. Give them all a ration of rum. Warm them up. [MOVES AWAY TO WRITE IN LOG.]

THIRD SAILOR

Yes, sir.

FIRST SAILOR

He's mad, I've been telling you.

SECOND SAILOR

We should kill him.

THIRD SAILOR/NAVIGATOR

No more of that talk.

SECOND SAILOR

When he's asleep.

FIRST SAILOR

Batter his skull in.

THIRD SAILOR

No more of that, I said.

FIRST SAILOR

But he never does sleep.

SECOND SAILOR

Sh. Here he comes.

ANCIENT MARINER

I'll take the helm.

(Announced): LESSON IN NAVIGATION

[ANCIENT MARINER upstage at helm in dim light.
NAVIGATOR downstage with two sailors as his students.
They read their lines from books which they hold.]

FIRST SAILOR

What is the world ? Of what parts does it consist ?

NAVIGATOR

The world is the universe of men made up of heaven, earth, the sea, and the sky. It is always in motion. No rest is ever granted it. Further, it is divided into two parts or regions: the celestial region, and the region of the elements.

SECOND SAILOR

And what of the stars?

NAVIGATOR

The stars are heavenly bodies made of fire. They are placed above in the firmament and below them, all is transparent. Therefore, we are able to see them.

FIRST SAILOR

I ask further, What are the poles?

NAVIGATOR

The poles are two points which we imagine to exist in the sky. They are called the poles of the world because they are the endpoints of the earth's axis.

SECOND SAILOR

What is the horizon?

NAVIGATOR

The horizon is a great circle around the earth; it is called the horizon, meaning the end of our view, because our view encompasses only half of the sky and half of the earth.

(Announced): END OF THE LESSON IN NAVIGATION

[THE THREE SAILORS resume their characters.]

ANCIENT MARINER

Navigator.

THIRD SAILOR/NAVIGATOR

Sir. There's nothing living in this place.

ANCIENT MARINER

Look to those lines. Helmsman, the ice flow to starboard.
(to THIRD SAILOR) I see that.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

The water has no fish. There are no birds. Nothing. Our provisions are low to begin with. If we don't freeze, sir, we'll starve.

SECOND SAILOR

Look!

FIRST SAILOR

What is it?

SECOND SAILOR

Hey! Hey!

FIRST SAILOR

Hey! Hey! Hey!

ANCINET MARINER

Look-out, what say you?

SECOND SAILOR

A bird sir. A tremendous, tremendous bird.

FIRST SAILOR

Hey hey halloo yo, yo sweet bird.

ANCIENT MARINER

That's enough of that racket.

THIRD SAILOR

Such a huge bird. It's wings are almost as big as the small sail.

ANCIENT MARINER

I never saw anything like it.

SECOND SAILOR

It's soars so gracefully.

FIRST SAILOR

Hello! Sweet bird. The first living thing I've seen. It's a sign, captain, surely.

[BLACK OUT.]

[ALBATROSS ENTERS A LIGHTED AREA
ADJACENT.]

ALBATROSS

I watch the others, the humans. For a long long time I have watched them. They are strange to me. Rather than balance in the air as I do, they grasp. O how strange it is to see -- they call them "hands," the things that they grasp with.

Their path through the world is so labored. And they seem so heavy to me. They can't float on the waves, as I can. They force there way through them inside a thing called a "ship." They live inside of it too. Yet it isn't a nest. And they do not really want to be there.

There are so many of these creatures, these humans. I do not always allow them to see me. Only sometimes.

The world that I've known grows darker and darker.

[LIGHTS UP ON SHIP.]

[ENTER ALBATROSS IN ORNAMENTED ROBE.]

SECOND SAILOR

Oh catain look look look how beautiful she is.

FIRST SAILOR

Why do you say she?

[ALBATROSS EXITS.]

THIRD SAILOR

He's been at sea too long.

ANCIENT MARINER

I've never seen anything like it.

SECOND SAILOR

It's a sign, Captain, surely.

ANCIENT MARINER

Navigator.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

A sign, sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

Of what?

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

I don't know, sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

You're a fool.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

I'm old. Years I have been here, sir, long years.

SECOND SAILOR

Ah god, come back, sweet bird, let me see you.

ANCIENT MARINER

Look to your stations, fools. Pigs I have. A bird....
Navigator –

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

It returns, captain.

SECOND SAILOR

So beautiful.

FIRST SAILOR

So strange.

[ANCIENT MARINER produces a crossbow. The three sailors watch in silence.]

[STAGE DARKENS. SPOT ON ANCIENT MARINER, SPOT ON ALBATROSS AT OPPOSITE SIDE OF STAGE. NARROW TRACK OF LIGHT LINKING THEM.]

[The ANCIENT MARINER fires crossbow. The ALBATROSS gathers her robe around herself and sinks down.]

[BLACK OUT.]

[LIGHTS UP ON SHIP.]

SECOND SAILOR

Captain...

FIRST SAILOR

She's dead.

THIRD SAILOR

You've killed her.

ANCIENT MARINER

I killed her. I never saw anything like it.

[BLACK OUT.]

SCENE 2

[LIGHTS UP. THE SHIP.]

FIRST SAILOR

The ice gives way before us.

SECOND SAILOR

We make such strong headway.

ANCIENT MARINER

Navigator, what stars are these?

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

I know them, sir. We near the line of the equator.

FIRST SAILOR

The fog and mist have cleared. the ice moves away from the prow as though by magic.

SECOND SAILOR

It was just as well to kill the bird.

FIRST SAILOR

Aye it was the bird that did it, that held us back. It had an evil spell on us. I could see it.

SECOND SAILOR

He was right to kill it, after all. Don't you think?

THIRD SAILOR/NAVIGATOR

I don't know how we have covered so much distance. Our position...I don't understand.

SECOND SAILOR

The captain knows everything. He's crazy, but he knows what he's doing.

FIRST SAILOR

I just wish I could of ate that bird.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

It fell into the sea without of trace.

FIRST SAILOR

It would of been damned good too -- roasted, nice and juicy.

SECOND SAILOR

Oh don't remind me.

[BLACK OUT.]

[LIGHTS UP ON VICTORIAN STUDY. DARWIN.]

DARWIN

Delight is too mild a word to describe the reaction of the naturalist who, for the first time, has wandered by himself in the Brazilian rain forest. The luxuriant thickness of the grasses, the hugeness of the flowers, the glossy green of the foliage, filled me with admiration. A curious mixture of sound and silence pervades the shady parts of the wood. The noise from the insects is so loud that it may be heard even hundreds of yards from shore; yet within the recesses of the forest, a universal hush appears to reign.

[BLACK OUT.]

[Lights up on the ship. The first and second sailors are dancing, hooting and hollering, banging pots and pans, and chanting.]

FIRST AND SECOND SAILOR

Hurray hurray
Heyhey heyhey
We're sailing away
Away away
And where we're going
No man can say
Heyhey heyhey
Hurray hurray

THIRD SAILOR

I told them to be quiet, sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

Let them celebrate. Neptune himself could not stop us. We move forward well, do we not ?

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

Aye, sir, strangely well.

ANCIENT MARINER

Then let them have some fun. Break out some rum for the poor bastards.

[SAILORS CONTINUE.]

[LIGHTS UP ON VICTORIAN STUDY. DARWIN.]

DARWIN

The sailors engaged in a custom of celebrating wildly when the ship traversed the line of the equator. At these times, weather permitting, a general pandemonium reigned in which, unfortunately, none were spared, but all were subject to the same rite of initiation. This most disagreeable operation consisted in having one's face rubbed with paint and tar, and then being half drowned in a sail filled with sea water.

ALL THREE SAILORS

No matter who you are
We'll paint your face with tar
And it will look
As weird as any creature
In the weirdest book
No matter who you are
We'll paint your face with tar

[TWILIGHT ON SAILORS AND SHIP.]

[LIGHTS UP ON VICTORIAN STUDY.]

DARWIN

One day in the Brazilian forest my attention was drawn by many spiders, cockroaches, and other insects, rushing in the greatest agitation across a bare piece of ground. A little way behind, every stalk and leaf was blackened by swarming masses of small dark-colored ants. Anything in their path was quickly enclosed and devoured in such a way

that it seemed, as it writhed on the ground, to be dissolving in a mass of black dots. It was wonderful the lengths to which creatures would go to evade the all-devouring swarm.

[BLACK OUT. LIGHTS UP ON SHIP.]

ALL THREE SAILORS

We'll wrap you in a sheet
From your head down to your feet
A very white white sheet
All full of salty water from the sea
That's what we'll do to thee
O Captain O Captain
Wait and see

[BLACK OUT.]

[LIGHTS UP. In a neutral location. ALBATROSS.]

ALBATROSS

I am the angel of solitude. Yet I see that the humans can never be by themselves. So many mouths to talk, and all talking at once, and so few ears to listen, and really none listening. And when they think, then it is only more talking, except that the voices are all inside of them. And always I have to hear it.

If I cried out, who would hear me?

The sea has only one thing to wait for.

[BLACK OUT.]

[LIGHTS UP ON SHIP.]

FIRST SAILOR (drunk)

Nothing can stop us now. Neptune himself couldn't stop us.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

Be quiet.

FIRST SAILOR

What's he but an old fish head like you. You old fish head.
Little yellow fish head bastard.

THIRD SAILOR

I said be quiet.

FIRST SAILOR

I saw Chinamen like that once that's how they are. You
remind me of them with your little charts and star gizmos
there. That's how they are.

ANCIENT MARINER

Put him in irons.

FIRST SAILOR

I ching...Book of Changing or some shit...

ANCIENT MARINER

Stop his mouth. Shut up the drunken drool out him.
Enough!

FIRST SAILOR

And I say nothing can stop us now! We're unsinkable, we're getting rich, and then we're all going to get laid. Or the other way around, whatever....

[They try to gag him. There is a struggle.]

FIRST SAILOR

Even the captain'll get laid, can you picture that ha ha...ha ha...

[They gag him.]

[BLACK OUT.]

[LIGHTS UP. STUDY. DARWIN.]

DARWIN

And one day I was fortunate enough to witness a Pepsis wasp fighting with a large spider of the genus Lycosa. The wasp made a sudden dart at its enemy, thrust home its sting, and then flew off. The spider, still alive, attempted to hide in a tuft of grass, but the wasp ranged back and forth until it found it and then, with the most wonderful precision, it stung the spider twice more on the abdomen and dragged it away. But it was the slave-holders that....

Once when crossing a ferry near Rio de Janeiro with a negro who spoke scant English I talked loudly and made signs, endeavoring to make myself understood, and in doing so I inadvertently passed my hand for a moment near his face. Instantly he flinched back and made a cowering motion, and I was overcome with horror and disgust at seeing a great powerful man afraid of me, and I realized that this human being had been trained to a degradation

lower than that of the most helpless beast of burden. And then, again, at the hacienda of an Englishman by the name of Lennon there was an elderly woman, a gentle grandmotherly sort, who disciplined her negroes by having an overseer crush their fingers in a vice or, in an operation performed with a razor and pliers, rip out their nails. And on other occasions I have ridden with slave owners through dense forest, beneath tall trees as high as the ship's mast and looked up suddenly to see the bodies of negroes, both men and women, and even children a few times, hanging from limbs where their bodies were left to rot, just as farmers in England nail the carcasses of foxes and weasels to fence posts. And this was all considered perfectly natural.

[FADE TO BLACK.]

[LIGHTS UP. THE SHIP. BRIGHT MORNING. ALL HAVE HANG OVERS.]

FIRST SAILOR

How much did we drink?

THIRD SAILOR

Too much.

FIRST SAILOR

Or not enough

SECOND SAILOR

Sober again.

FIRST SAILOR

Calm, beautiful day

SECOND SAILOR

Shows what a fool you are.

THIRD SAILOR

We haven't moved. All night we were as still as the dead.

SECOND SAILOR

The sea is angry. It's because of you.

FIRST SAILOR

The sea is as smooth as glass. It's calm. It likes us. It's like a mirror with the sun shining on it.

THIRD SAILOR

You insulted it.

FIRST SAILOR

Would you rather have ice and cold and waves as high as the mast?

SECOND SAILOR

The captain brought us through that by killing that damned bird.

FIRST SAILOR

That's right and I helped him and now we're home free.

THIRD SAILOR

Fools talk like that.

[ENTER ANCIENT MARINER.]

ANCIENT MARINER

Take him out of his irons.

[They do so.]

FIRST SAILOR

Ah. Freedom.

ANCIENT MARINER

Get to work. Hoist all sails. Maybe we'll catch a breeze.

SECOND SAILOR

Aye, sir.

THIRD SAILOR

Look, sir, look!

ANCIENT MARINER

What?

FIRST SAILOR

No no no get away!

SECOND SAILOR

Get away from me!

THIRD SAILOR

Run for your lives!

ANCIENT MARINER

What do you see?

THIRD SAILOR

A horrid monster, captain.

FIRST SAILOR

With seven heads slimy skin

SECOND SAILOR

Eyes red as coals

THIRD SAILOR

A mouth that drips slime and blood like a woman a whore
of the sea

FIRST SAILOR

Tangled masses of snakes a head like a jellyfish

[ENTER ALBATROSS IN ORNAMENTED ROBE. SHE
SPREADS IT WIDE. THEY ALL FALL DOWN.]

THIRD SAILOR

OH OH!

FIRST SAILOR

Such a bright light.

SECOND SAILOR

I'm blind!

FIRST SAILOR

I'm blind, I'm blind....

THIRD SAILOR

I'm blind. I can't see.

SECOND SAILOR

(still out of character)

AND THEY BEHELD THE CLOUDS OF ANGELS
WHEREIN HE STOOD ASCEND TO HEAVEN

FIRST SAILOR

My eyes my eyes my eyes –

SECOND SAILOR (back in character)

I can't see.

THIRD SAILOR
Everything is all white...

ANCIENT MARINER
I see you.

ALBATROSS
Only you do.

ANCIENT MARINER
You're dead.

ALBATROSS
I am here.

ANCIENT MARINER
Why?

ALBATROSS
To ask you a question.

ANCIENT MARINER
What question?

ALBATROSS
Why did you kill me?

ANCIENT MARINER
Leave me in peace.

ALBATROSS
Why did you? Why did you kill me?

ANCIENT MARINER
Please. Please. Leave me.

SECOND SAILOR

No no no !

THIRD SAILOR

Captain, the horror --

FIRST SAILOR

Make it go away.

THIRD SAILOR

It's the monster from the pit under the sea, from the other side of the world.

SECOND SAILOR

We fell off the edge after all. We fell off the edge....

ALBATROSS

Why did you kill me?

ANCIENT MARINER

By Isis, by Astarte, by the White Mother of all things, I command you to leave me in peace.

[ALBATROSS SPREADS HER ARMS WIDE A
SECOND TIME.]

[ALL ARE STILL.]

ALBATROSS

(SOFTLY) Why did you kill me ?

ANCIENT MARINER

(LONG PAUSE) I don't know.

[ALBATROSS DROPS HER ARMS. FOLDS THE ROBE ABOUT HER.]

FIRST SAILOR

The jelly fish clings to my face.

SECOND SAILOR

Snakes are tangled in my hair, sea snakes.

THIRD SAILOR

My legs are like pale roots, like a squid's tentacles, the suckers bleed me dry.

ALBATROSS

You will pay.

[EXIT ALBATROSS.]

FIRST SAILOR

It's gone it's...

SECOND SAILOR

All gone.

THIRD SAILOR

Thank the stars.

[FADE TO BLACK.]

SCENE 3

[LIGHTS UP. THE SHIP.]

SECOND SAILOR

Becalmed.

FIRST SAILOR

We we're making such headway before.

SECOND SAILOR

But now --

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

Here we sit.

ANCIENT MARINER

Navigator.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

Sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

Put the men on half rations until we get wind in our sails again.

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

Yes sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

And the water?

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

It's very low sir.

ANCIENT MARINER

Ration that as well.

THIRD SAILOR

Aye sir.

SECOND SAILOR

I never saw such a still sea.

FIRST SAILOR

And it's so hot.

SECOND SAILOR

First we froze.

THIRD SAILOR

And now we roast.

FIRST SAILOR

And the water is so strange here.

SECOND SAILOR

It seems...

FIRST SAILOR

...to rot.

THIRD SAILOR

The sea itself is rotting.

FIRST SAILOR

Slimy creatures...

SECOND SAILOR

...slither all around in it.

FIRST SAILOR

Like a soup of maggots it looks sometimes.

SECOND SAILOR

And long sea snakes thread through it.

THIRD SAILOR

The serpents of the sea, the scorpions of the sea. One bite
and your gone.

SECOND SAILOR

The sun -- did you ever see such a strange sun?

FIRST SAILOR

Like blood.

SECOND SAILOR

Huge.

THIRD SAILOR

And still. Right above the mast it stands. It never moves.

SECOND SAILOR

No, it never moves.

THIRD SAILOR

And then at night it drops straight down into the sea.

FIRST SAILOR

The sea swallows it up.

SECOND SAILOR

At dawn it breaks out with red streaks all through it, like
the bloody yoke of an egg.

FIRST SAILOR

And in a minute its high as noon again.

THIRD SAILOR

And I can never tell what time it really is.

(announced: THE DANCE OF TIME)

Three SHADOW PLAYERS and THE NAVIGATOR comprise two pairs of dancers who stretch out two long gold threads and move with them circularly, one pair clockwise the other counter clockwise, measuring the intervals of space and time on the stage, which is flooded in deep blue light. To one side THE ALBATROSS PLAYER, without her ornamented robe, rings a small handbell softly at intervals. On the opposite side, THE DARWIN ACTOR READS.

DARWIN (out of character)

When people first started to record time, the most obvious event was the rising and setting of the sun.

A year is the time it takes the earth to make one complete revolution around the sun.

The regular succession of day and night is due to the rotation of the earth on its axis.

Time can be reckoned only for a particular place and is different for other places not on the same meridian.

[THE DANCE OF TIME ENDS. THE PLAYERS LEAVE THE STAGE.]

[FADE TO BLACK.]

[LIGHTS UP ON STUDY. DARWIN.]

DARWIN

Part of our mission was to make more accurate measurements of longitude and to coordinate them with the readings of our numerous marine chronometers. I was not myself involved in this enterprise, and so was little concerned with it, for I was preoccupied with gathering my specimens. But it very much interested Captain Fitz Roy. Sailors, of course, are naturally very concerned with such things. But his interest was more than that. It was somehow connected with his belief that in our geological observations of the South American coast, some proof concerning the literal truth of the Bible was to be found. It seems mad now, absolutely mad. Though at the time, I actually shared his belief. The literal truth of the Bible.

[BLACKOUT]

[LIGHTS UP ON SHIP]

FIRST SAILOR

I'm dying, I'm dying of thirst. Water.

SECOND SAILOR

Water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.

FIRST SAILOR

We have the whole ocean but no water. That's funny. That's so funny. Captain, don't you think that's funny?

THIRD SAILOR/NAV

He didn't hear you.

ANCIENT MARINER

...green how I love you green so green I came into the river
country...

THIRD SAILOR

He's dreaming.

SECOND SAILOR

Of what, I wonder.

ANCIENT MARINER

...all green the earth smell green rain through the leaves on
my face the lights at night in the harbor the birds the love
of my life the stranger she was...

FIRST SAILOR

Women, heh...

ANCIENT MARINER

...from the dark wood her name she read my fortune the
horizon the beautiful stranger

FIRST SAILOR

(crawling across the stage)

I'd settle for water. I have...

SECOND AND THIRD SAILORS

NO!

FIRST SAILOR (STILL CRAWLING)

...to have...water.

SECOND AND THIRD SAILORS

NO!

[HE DRINKS SEA WATER.]

SECOND SAILOR

You can't drink the sea.

[GAGS.]

THIRD SAILOR

It will kill. The sea kills.

[GASPING, RETCHING]

FIRST SAILOR

Thirst...

THIRD SAILOR

There's nothing to do for him.

FIRST SAILOR

Thirst is a fire.

THIRD SAILOR

It's called sea water.

SECOND SAILOR

Wait.... LOOK!

THIRD SAILOR

What?

SECOND SAILOR

Look. Against the sun. A black cross like burnt sticks.

THIRD SAILOR

Something....

SECOND SAILOR

A sail. A ship.

THIRD SAILOR
A ship?

SECOND SAILOR
There. See?

[LONG PAUSE]

SECOND AND THIRD SAILORS
WE'RE SAVED!! WE'RE SAVED!!

SECOND SAILOR
Captain!

THIRD SAILOR
Wake up, Captain!

SECOND AND THIRD SAILORS
YO HEY HEY HEY HEY HEY

ANCIENT MARINER
Where?

THIRD SAILOR
There Captain.

SECOND SAILOR
We're saved.

ANCIENT MARINER
She comes very fast.

SECOND AND THIRD SAILORS
HERE HERE HEY

[BLACK OUT.]

[IN DARKNESS:]

ANCIENT MARINER

Look. Two eyes.

THIRD SAILOR

Red eyes.

SECOND SAILOR

A sea monster again.

ANCIENT MARINER

No. Green.

THIRD SAILOR

No. Red.

[LIFE-IN-DEATH and DEATH-IN-LIFE enter while the stage is still in darkness. They carry lanterns that flash green/red in unison. The color they announce is always the opposite of the one seen. The stage grows lighter after they enter.]

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Red light. Green light.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Red light. Green light.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Is this the one? Is this him? What do you think, sister?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Has he ever seen witches before? What do you think, sister ?

[SHE CIRCLES AROUND HIM FLASHING HER LIGHT.]

Red light green light red light.... Well, have you?

ANCIENT MARINER

Who are you?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

What's wrong with your man?

THIRD SAILOR

He drank sea water.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Dumb. Do you want him sister, or shall I?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

He's mine. He's restored. [SNAPS FINGERS.] For now.

FIRST SAILOR

Agh, agh agh... I can swallow again --

LIFE-IN-DEATH

For now.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Who gets what, sister ?

Dice. LIFE-IN-DEATH

Throw. DEATH-IN-LIFE

Call. LIFE-IN-DEATH

Snake eyes. DEATH-IN-LIFE

Throw again. LIFE-IN-DEATH

Call again. DEATH-IN-LIFE

Snake eyes again. LIFE-IN-DEATH

Snake eyes it is again. DEATH-IN-LIFE
Red light green light

Throw again. LIFE-IN-DEATH
I like this game. HA HA HA

Call again. DEATH-IN-LIFE

[ENTER DARWIN.]

DARWIN
No. No. No.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Professor, what are you doing here ?

DARWIN

No dice.

[DARWIN SEIZES THE DICE FROM LIFE-IN-DEATH.
THEY STRUGGLE FOR THEM BRIEFLY.]

LIFE-IN DEATH

No!

DARWIN

No dice. Chance is not a game.

[GETS THEM AWAY FROM HER.]

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Give me my dice back.

[DARWIN THROWS THE DICE ONTO THE STAGE.]

DARWIN

They always come up the same.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

You never can tell, professor. Besides, can't you take a
joke ?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

There are swervings. Atoms can swerve from their paths,
sand in an hour glass.... But you know about time. Tell him,
sister.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Red light green light red light green light

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Goes backward sometimes.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

red light green light

LIFE-IN-DEATH

(POINTING TO SAILORS)

They belong to me now.

DEATH-IN-LIFE ("he" = MARINER)

And he belongs to me, and you do too, but you don't know
it.

DARWIN

Not always.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Yes always.

DARWIN

No, not always.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Oh listen to him, sister.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Red light green light red light professor green light
professor

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Listen to him, listen to him. Is this the man? Is this the one
who discovered the secrets of life and death, this...this
piece of shit?

DARWIN

I spit on you.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

I own you

DARWIN

I vomit you up. I was so sea sick the whole time. I see the
reason now -- ready with loathsome vomiting to spew my
soul out of one hell into another. But there is no other hell
except the sea. The sea is...a medusa. I looked. I was turned
into stone.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

I'm the stone. She is too

[DEATH-IN-LIFE AND LIFE-IN-DEATH ATTEMPT TO
ENWRAP DARWIN IN AN INSIDIOUS EMBRACE.]

DARWIN

Get away! Get away!

[He struggles free of them. Pause.]

I was never Darwin. I was nothing. The eyes in my head
looked out at the world. It flowed past. Yet I could never
touch the world of water as it flowed past me.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Go back to your study. I'll see you --

[EXIT DARWIN.]

Later. But now. I put a spell

LIFE-IN-DEATH

And I do to

DEATH-IN-LIFE

on you

LIFE-IN-DEATH

and you and you and you.

FIRST SAILOR

Heh. What kind of bullshit is this ?

SECOND SAILOR

The get these bitches out of here.

THIRD SAILOR

Throw them overboard.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Witches, not bitches.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

The spell takes a minute to work.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

You might not feel yours at all for a long time. You see, I'm Death-in-Life. And now your mine. And this is my sister, Life-in-Death. And now these fools are hers.

THIRD SAILOR

Throw her overboard, captain.

FIRST SAILOR

No don't throw them overboard yet. How long has it been since you've seen a woman. Ha mate?

SECOND SAILOR

Them ? ugh

FIRST SAILOR

Better than nothing.

SECOND SAILOR

Well. (thinks) All right. Where's that rum?

FIRST SAILOR

Captain we have other plans for these bitches witches whatever ha ha

SECOND SAILOR

Ha ha. Why don't we have a party.

[THE FIRST AND SECOND SAILOR TRY TO SEIZE
THE TWO WITCHES BUT ARE STOPPED FROZEN.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

See. It's working now.

[THE THIRD IS STRICKEN TOO.]

LIFE-IN-DEATH

And him too.

[THEY SINK TO THEIR KNEES AND THEN LIE FACE
DOWN.]

ANCIENT MARINER

What's happened to them?

[BLACK OUT.]

[In the darkness the three shadow players enter, each
carrying a candle. They move in a circle around the bodies
of the fallen sailors.]

[EXIT.]

[LIGHTS UP SLOWLY.]

ANCIENT MARINER

I must be dreaming. A nightmare. I dreamed my crew were
dead and then ghost men made of light came, auras of light
shone round them and they moved in a circle slowly as
sometimes at night in the tropic sea beneath the moon
you'll observe the tracks of golden light in the water, the
angels of the sea we called them. What is this place?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

They're dead. Those were their souls leaving their bodies.

ANCIENT MARINER

Forever?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Forever.

ANCIENT MARINER

But they're still here.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Those are just their bodies. Go ahead. Touch them.

ANCIENT MARINER

No!

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Hah ha

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Ha ha ha

ANCIENT MARINER

And what about me?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

You're alive. Yet dead. Inside. [SHE TAPS HIS CHEST.]
All hollow in there.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

All right now. Chop them up.

[DEATH-IN-LIFE PRODUCES AN AXE AND
CHOPPING BLOCK. THE SHADOW PLAYERS
ENTER. THEY SERVE AS ASSISTANTS.]

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Grab him.

[THEY SEIZE THE ANCIENT MARINER.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Put him in irons.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

That one first. Step forward. (To FIRST SAILOR. HE
STEPS FORWARD PASSIVELY.)

We'll bring his mind back slowly.

FIRST SAILOR

Where am I? Mommy? Daddy?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Now Captain, you're going to learn an important lesson,
just like the professor.

ANCIENT MARINER

What?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

The sea is a mirror.

BOTH WITCHES

NOW!

[THEY CAST A SPELL ON THE STAGE FLOOR,
RIGHT.]

AND NOW!

[THEY COMPLETE THE SPELL ON THE STAGE
FLOOR, LEFT.]

[FIRST SAILOR KNEELS. LOOKS AT HIMSELF
WONDERINGLY IN THE STAGE FLOOR.]

FIRST SAILOR

I'm so...intricate. I'm so beautiful.... Wonderful. I
have...eyes, my face...hands, arms. My hands,
my...shoulders, chest...my face.... Oh mother...father...who
? ...why ? Why here ?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

STRETCH HIM OUT!

[THE SHADOW PLAYERS SEIZE HIM.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

What do you see?

FIRST SAILOR

My life.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Good.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

And now?

FIRST SAILOR

No no no no

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Hold him down there. Stretch out his arm. Ready sister?
CHOP OFF HIS ARM!

[DEATH-IN-LIFE HITS THE CHOPPING BLOCK WITH
THE AXE. FIRST SAILOR WRITHES ON THE STAGE
IN AGONY.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

And what do you see?

ANCIENT MARINER

The stage is covered in blood. There's blood all over. The
blood flows all over the stage. Take it away! Get it away
from me! Take the blood away!

LIFE-IN-DEATH

And in the mirror?

ANCIENT MARINER

A bleeding stump. Take it away. Please.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

And now what do you see?

ANCIENT MARINER

He still has his arm.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

And in the mirror?

ANCIENT MARINER

Oh! No!

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Look!

ANCIENT MARINER

The bleeding stump of his shoulder, an arm drifting in the sea. A sea of blood.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

And now his turn. Step right up.

[SECOND SAILOR STEPS FORWARD.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Grab him. Strap him down.

[THE SHADOW PLAYERS STRETCH THE SECOND
SAILOR OUT ON HIS BACK.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Ready, sister?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Ready.

DEATH-IN-LIFE
CHOP OFF HIS LEGS! BOTH OF THEM!

[LIFE-IN-DEATH STRIKES THE CHOPPING BLOCK
TWICE WITH THE AXE:]

LIFE-IN-DEATH
FIRST ONE! THEN THE OTHER!

[THE SECOND SAILOR WRITHES IN EVEN
GREATER PAIN ON THE STAGE.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE
What do you see ?

ANCIETN MARINER
[TURNS FACE AWAY, EYES CLOSED.] NO.

DEATH-IN-LIFE
Look.

LIFE-IN-DEATH
Look. (to Shadow Players.) Get him !

[THE SHADOW PLAYERS DRAG THE ANCIENT
MARINER OVER AND TWIST HIS HEAD, FORCING
HIM TO LOOK INTO THE STAGE FLOOR "MIRROR."]

DEATH-IN-LIFE
What ?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Do you see ?

ANCIENT MARINER

The bloody stumps of his legs. He crawls on bloody stumps
on the floor of the sea. Blood flows all over me in streams.
Gouts of bleeding flesh stick to me. Oh Jesus save me !

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Who?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

I don't know.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Who, sister?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Beats me.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

They say that if a male frog has his legs cut off while he's
in the middle of... copulating with a female, guess what
happens? He still keeps right on. I'm Death-In-Life. GO TO
IT FROGGY!

[THE SECOND SAILOR WRITHES IN AGONY AGAIN.

THEN HE COPULATES WITH THE STAGE FLOOR.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

That's enough.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Not quite. I have things in the sea that can grow back their arms or their legs, or even their heads. Chop one off, another grows in its place. Maybe these creatures are like that. What do you think, sister? I'm Life-in-Death. Life continues, even in death. Isn't it wonderful ?

ANCIENT MARINER

I don't want to see.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Show him, sister.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

All right.

ANCIENT MARINER

No.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Step forward, you.

[THIRD SAILOR STEPS FORWARD.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Get him!

[THE SHADOW PLAYERS SEIZE HIM. THEY PLACE A BLACK HOOD OVER HIS HEAD.]

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Chop off his head!

[DEATH-IN-LIFE STRIKES THE CHOPPING BLOCK
WITH THE AXE.]

[THE THIRD SAILOR FALLS TO THE STAGE.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

What do you see? Look!

ANCIENT MARINER

His head floats in the bloody waves. His eyes look at me.
They've gone gray like hailstones. Now his head...liquefies.
It's like a jellyfish.
Please, no more.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

The best is yet to come.

[LIFE-IN-DEATH WHISTLES THREE TIMES THEN
CHANTS:]

Grow back, grow back
Grow back
What you lack.
Everything missing
Must now GROW BACK !

FIRST SAILOR

AH AH like hot pliers ripping at me

THIRD SAILOR

I'm being stretched out like a wrack it is

SECOND SAILOR

maggots swarm in my bloody stumps and grow bigger the
maggots

ANCIENT MARINER

I don't believe it.

SECOND SAILOR

the maggots get bigger and bigger

ANCIENT MARINER

They're growing back.

THIRD SAILOR

a giant maggot a sea slug sprouting eyes like an eel eating
into my face like scorpion stings

ANCIENT MARINER

Their arms and legs...his head...it's growing back.

[ALL THREE SAILORS CONTINUE SCREAMING
AND WRITHING IN PAIN IN A CONFUSED MASS ON
THE STAGE FLOOR.]

[ENTER DARWIN. THE SAILORS GROW QUIETER.]

ANCIENT MARINER

I know you.

DARWIN

Yes.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

What do you say, Professor ? Can't sleep ?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Look Professor. What do you see ?

[THE SAILORS ARE STILL.]

[DARWIN PICKS UP ONE OF THE LAMPS. HOLDS IT
FOR A MOMENT, THEN KNEELS, TOUCHING THE
"MIRROR" OF THE STAGE FLOOR.]

DARWIN

A mirror. A lamp. Pieces of glass. I'm picking up pieces of
broken glass. Fragments. "When the lamp is shattered...."
An old song. A beautiful old poem.... Shelley...I remember.
Cambridge...1827. I went up.... Pieces...of glass....

DEATH-IN-LIFE

What can we do for you Professor ?

DARWIN

I want to die.

[BLACK OUT.]

SCENE 4

[LIGHTS UP to reveal the shrunken heads of the THREE SAILORS on poles.]

[Enter THE ALBATROSS in her ornamented robe. She crouches in the midst of them as though in fear of them. Then she moves away.]

ALBATROSS

Hateful creatures. A kind of centipede, head after head after head, the segments of a centipede's body, the thousand legs stretching over the entire world, the jaws eating the tail. The centipede world. I watch it. I have to. But I move away from it, farther and farther.

Imagine soaring high above the earth, higher still and higher, floating as a disembodied spirit through the blue depths of the sky with nothing in your ears but the songs of the angelic hosts, seeing nothing but the gold of the sun, the blue of the sky, the silver sparkle of the waves of the sea, the lovely green of the uninhabited earth. Imagine sunrise and sunset that first day, and everyday thereafter, each day the same: the bright annunciation of dawn after the dark of night, the golden glory of sunset after the blue of day.

But instead, in my hell of empty space, tormented by the last remnants of light that pierce me like arrows, I see the devastated spaces of the earth.

I hear the voices of the tortured, the drip of blood,
The rustle of silk scarves and currency.

And the lies,
The lies on top of lies,
Are like glacier ice
Covering the seas, covering the entire earth.

The sea has only one thing to wait for.

[BLACK OUT]

[LIGHTS UP. VICTORIAN STUDY. DARWIN.]

DARWIN

But certainly one of the most dismal parts of the expedition was our time spent on the island known as Tierra del Fuego.

The climate of this region is certainly wretched. The summer solstice was now passed, yet every day snow fell on the hills, and in the valleys there was incessant rain and sleet.

While going one day on shore we pulled aside a canoe of six natives. They were the most abject and miserable creatures I anywhere beheld. Despite the freezing temperature, they were nearly naked, and one full-grown woman was absolutely so. It was raining heavily, and the fresh water together with the spray trickled down her body. She was nursing a recently born child, and sleet fell and thawed on her naked bosom and on the skin of her naked baby.

These poor wretches were stunted in their growth, their hideous faces bedaubed with white paint, their skins filthy and greasy, their hair entangled, their voices discordant, and their gestures violent. Viewing such men, one can hardly make oneself believe that they are fellow-creatures, and inhabitants of the same world.

[BLACK OUT]

[LIGHTS UP. The Ship. The Shrunk heads still on poles. The ANCIENT MARINER alone.]

ANCIENT MARINER

Frozen
I was frozen
In the arctic moonlight
Icicle loneliness
I, I, I
The moon said
Frozen by itself
Alone in the darkness of the sky

And then
In the tropic sea
I sweated in the drought
When there was only water
The sea's bright and deadly water
All around and all about

And now there's only me
Adrift on the emptiness

Now there's only me
The others are all dead
"Lose all companions"
That's what my fortune said

[LIGHTS GO DIM.]

[Enter DARWIN.]

[The ANCIENT MARINER assumes the role of Capt. Robert Fitz Roy, Royal Navy and Captain of H.M.S. Beagle. His costume changes accordingly. The costume may take place in front of the audience. FITZ ROY holds a Bible. They appear in a small circle of light. A lamp swings back and forth over their heads. In the back ground the two witches play their dice game.]

FITZ ROY

Confound it Darwin, do you really believe that there could be anything but an omnipotent creator? How could we account for the order and harmony that we see in the universe were it not for some divine presence which fashioned it, and with some purpose in mind, a divinity which guides and directs it?

DARWIN

Order and harmony? Captain Fitz Roy, I'm afraid that my studies, my observations...

FITZ ROY

Precisely, your studies and your observations, and those are the observations of a fallible human being.

DARWIN

That is true, sir.

FITZ ROY

And forgive me if I give any offence whatever, and you can rest assured that I certainly do not intend to, indeed that would be the furthest thing from my mind, for you know quite well I esteem your abilities, your powers of observation – I've often been little less than astonished by them – yet still...

DARWIN

The Bible –

FITZ ROY

Is the literal and inspired Word of God.

DARWIN

Is a fabric of Asiatic tales and myths.

FITZ ROY

I refuse to hear this.

DARWIN

Designed to inspire faith, inspired themselves no doubt....

FITZ ROY

I refuse to listen.

DARWIN

But still tales.

FITZ ROY

NO!

[BLACK OUT on FITZ ROY and DARWIN.]

[The WITCHES go on playing. They are giggling and laughing to themselves, having overheard the preceding argument]

DEATH-IN-LIFE and LIFE-IN-DEATH
jabber jabber jabber jabber jabber jabber

[BLACK OUT ON THEM]

[LIGHTS UP ON SHIP. The ANCIENT MARINER as before.

ENTER THE THREE SAILORS AS ZOMBIES.]

ANCIENT MARINER
NO you're a dream a nightmare. GET AWAY FROM ME!
You're dead. I saw your heads on poles shrunk to the size
of goards. Go. Don't look at me. Take your eyes off me.
Get away.

[THE THREE SAILORS STAND THERE BLANKLY.]

[ENTER DARWIN]

DARWIN
You shouldn't be afraid of the dead. It's the living you have
to fear.

ANCIENT MARINER

Are they the same men?

DARWIN

More or less.

ANCIENT MARINER

What are you?

DARWIN

I'm a magician.

ANCIENT MARINER

You're a conjuror.

DARWIN

Yes.

ANCIENT MARINER

I know. I've seen you before.

DARWIN

Many times. I'll give your men back to you. They'll be just as they were. It will be a special arrangement, a secret, just between you and me.

ANCIENT MARINER

How can you do it?

DARWIN

I can do it. In a sense. But you can't tell anyone. And in return, you have to do one thing for me.

ANCIENT MARINER

What?

DARWIN

When next we meet, take this knife and stab me with it, and kill me. Kill me with this knife. Be sure to do it.

[Hands him the knife. Exit DARWIN.]

Enter DEATH-IN-LIFE and LIFE-IN-DEATH.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Have you been talking to him again?

ANCIENT MARINER

No.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

We'll see. Won't we sister?

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Yes. We will.

[BLACK OUT.]

[LIGHTS UP.THE SHIP]

[The ANCIENT MARINER. The SHADOW PLAYERS opposite.]

[Behind a translucent veil illuminated from behind by a lamp, the three SHADOWS act out THE SCENE OF BIRTH. Their spoken parts are ad lib. THE SCENE is an apparition before the MARINER'S eyes.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

See what's behind there.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Go ahead.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

He's trying to hide it from you.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Maybe it's the answer.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

But you can have it instead of him.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Go ahead.

[The ANCIENT MARINER takes up the knife DARWIN gave him. He rushes at the veil, knife raised, clearly intending to rip through it. Before he reaches it –

BLACK OUT.

[THEN LIGHTS UP.]

[The ANCIENT MARINER is left holding a veil, or perhaps nothing, THE SHADOW PLAYERS having disappeared.]

ANCIENT MARINER

Nothing. I saw it. Where?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Try again.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Yeah, try again.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

See.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Over there.

[THE SHADOW PLAYERS appear opposite. Again a translucent veil backlit with a lamp. THE SHADOWS enact THE SCENE OF DEATH. Their lines are ad lib and include fragments of Last Rites.]

[The ANCIENT MARINER approaches more slowly, knife at the ready. He lunges. But again –

BLACK OUT.

[LIGHTS UP. SAME RESULT AS BEFORE.]

[BOTH WITCHES COLLAPSE IN LAUGHTER.]

LIFE-IN-DEATH

So this is the great ANCIENT MARINER...

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Explorer of the unknown.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Have you ever seen a bigger joke, sister ?

DEATH-IN-LIFE

No. My god, what a fool he must be.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

You said it. A real schmuck.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

A real real schmuck.

BOTH

HA HA HA ETC

[BLACK OUT.]

SCENE 5

[LIGHTS UP. THE SHIP. The ANCIENT MARINER
lying on the deck.]

ANCIENT MARINER

We set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea. But
now...my head, my head...if I stand, the surge, the rude sea,
the sea surge...if I stand, I drift, afloat, spinning on the

maelstrom of my own dizziness...dizziness.... Where. Am.
I. I ? Is it I who speak ?

And the night is full of stars, the absurd lights.

[Enter DARWIN.]

ANCIENT MARINER
Again. Sir, no more. I'm tired. Very tired.

DARWIN
I know.

ANCIENT MARINER
Then end this.

DARWIN
I can't. Yet.

ANCIENT MARINER
Why does this continue?

DARWIN
You didn't do what I asked.

ANCIENT MARINER
What did you ask ? Sir, you're a conjurer. You do it. I am
only a man.

DARWIN
Poor poor sod, trapped in the midst of the sea. What is the
way out ? I asked you to kill me when next we met.

ANCIENT MARINER
We never met.

DARWIN

I was behind the veil.

ANCIENT MARINER

Which?

DARWIN

Didn't you see?

ANCIENT MARINER

I saw ...something. I didn't know what.

DARWIN

Where is the knife?

ANCIENT MARINER

Here.

DARWIN

Then kill me now.

ANCIENT MARINER

(spooked) No.

DARWIN

Yes. Now. Take the knife. It's a dissecting knife. Do it.

[DARWIN opens the collar of his shirt to expose his throat.
He kneels.]

Go ahead.

ANCIENT MARINER

I can't. I can no longer kill.

DARWIN

Then you'll never get your men back.

[The THREE SAILORS enter. They stand there blankly.]

DARWIN

(standing) And what is more, you don't deserve to live. He who does not kill, shall not live.

ANCIENT MARINER

What do you mean?

DARWIN

Just what I said. Sailors. Zombies. Unborn-living-living-dead. Do what you will! But kill him, whatever you do!

FIRST SAILOR

Anything?

DARWIN

Anything.

SECOND SAILOR

We can fuck?

THIRD SAILOR

Eat.

FIRST SAILOR

Get drunk.

DARWIN

Whatever. Do what you will. Be fruitful. Multiply. Go at it.
But kill him. Make sure to kill --

ANCIENT MARINER

No. I'm your captain.

FIRST SAILOR

You worked me like a dog.

[The THREE SAILORS seize the ANCIENT MARINER.
A struggle.]

ANCIENT MARINER

You'll rot in the chains ...hell. I'm stabbed.

DARWIN

Oh. You've done it. Good. Now it's almost over. (pause) Go
at it! More ! More! At last. I'm ...almost.

[THE SAILORS ARE BEWILDERED BUT THEN GET
THE IDEA.]

DARWIN

Smash it! Everything! But give me one thing. My knife.

[DARWIN IS GIVEN THE KNIFE. HE LICKS THE
BLOOD.]

DARWIN

SMASH IT! Smash everything! Everything!

[THE THREE SAILORS BEGIN TO DESTROY THE
SHIP.]

DARWIN

Everything! There too! Go ahead. Smash it. Throw out the
books. Make a bonfire out of them.

[THEY BEGIN TO DESTROY THE STUDY AS WELL.]

[ENTER WITCHES.]

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Red light

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Red light. Stop.

DARWIN

GO ON GO ON Pay no attention to them.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Who gave you authority ?

DARWIN

He's dead. Look for yourself.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

He's dead. Look, sister. As dead as a fish.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

Life bleeds out of him.

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Just like from a fish.

DARWIN

Now get out of here. Both of you.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

We have authority. Red light

LIFE-IN-DEATH

Green light

DARWIN

You're authority's rubbish. Now. Always was. Always will be from now to the end of time. Get the book.

[THIRD SAILOR TAKES UP BOOK. READS
RAPIDLY:]

"What emerges out of this is something one might call a genealogy, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts. And these genealogies..."

DARWIN

Silence! (pause) Silence now. (to witches) Leave me.

DEATH-IN-LIFE

They're ours.

DARWIN

No more. I'll have you ripped to pieces. No more images.

[DARWIN SWITCHES OFF THE MONITORS.]

No more images!

I was never Darwin. You were never men. You two witches...all of you -- fragments of men, bits of old tales. You're nothing now. The spell is broken. Do whatever you want. It doesn't matter. DO WHATEVER YOU WANT !

[The FIRST and SECOND SAILORS chase the two WITCHES, who flee. The THIRD SAILOR continues overturning books in the study. The two sailors return.]

[All THREE SAILORS proceed to smash everything in sight.]

[LIGHTS TO DIM.]

[THE VIDEO MONITORS ARE SMASHED.]

[BLACK OUT]

DARWIN

(in darkness, applauding, yet weary)

Well done. Well done. Well done. Very well done.

[LIGHTS UP slowly.]

[THE THREE SAILORS rouse themselves from their exhausting labor. They approach DARWIN.]

FIRST SAILOR

Make us dead again, Captain.

SECOND SAILOR

Yes Captain, make us dead again.

THIRD SAILOR

Dead again Captain.

[DARWIN raises his hands. The THREE SAILORS fall into DEATH/SLEEP.]

DARWIN (taking up knife)

No more blood. Therefore no more will. Therefore no more knowledge. Therefore sleep. When the lamp is shattered.... The mirror of the sea shattered.... Broken glass...nothing now.... Sleep.

[DARWIN sits slumped in a chair in the destroyed study, half asleep, dreaming.]

[Enter THE ALBATROSS] [SHE BENDS OVER HIM.]

DARWIN

Who...? What is it?

ALBATROSS

You know me.

DARWIN

No.... Yes. Yes.

ALBATROSS

Do you remember?

DARWIN

Yes. I remember. Very far, very far away. Stay. Stay.

ALBATROSS

No.

DARWIN

Please.

ALBATROSS

Once I came to announce the Reign of Wonder. But that was long ago. That time is finished.

DARWIN

Stay, please. (pause) Forgive me.

ALBATROSS

No. It's ended.

[SHE LEAVES.]

[DARWIN sinks down into chair and closes his eyes.]

[The stage grows dark, then light again to reveal:

THE DESTROYED SPACES

[Enter ALBATROSS (in ornamented robe).

SHE STEPS CAREFULLY AMONG THE WRECKAGE.

ALBATROSS

They are all asleep. (pause) How strange, they always look so strange. (pause) But now...they're very peaceful.

(pause)

I wonder what can come after them.

[SHE DANCES SLOWLY. STOPS.]

ALBATROSS

Before me there was no time.
After me there shall be none.
For with my birth it was born
And, with my death, undone.

[SHE GATHERS HER ROBE AROUND HER AND
SINKS DOWN.]

[FADE TO BLACK.]

END OF PLAY

WINTER POEMS

Shrapnel

I

On the earth edge of trees
the tree bank mauve-gray
washed with a matte dimness

And bronzed into quiet

A full moon
above the darkened fringe of the earth

II

Moonrise
Over the dark vulva of tree line

Bright circle cauled
With a faint capillary web of pink
and smoky orange

III

Near the end there is this
the genealogy beneath the final
illumination
The infinite deck of cards

Darkness
gone from the surface of stone
Where it had reigned and where the wind
had wandered

Light
sunk beneath the transience of water and wave
Which were darkened on all their faces

Radiance
descended to the body of clay
This mud
Now take
Take O take those lips away
Now take this mud
broken off from around the dark of the eyes

Which
Is the mask

Now take this
Take those lips away
taken from the surface of bone

Now take this

Which is nothing else
this the face

IV

Tipped past the standing trees the shadows
Long in the gold and iodine light of late evening
In the capital of dust
Somewhere near the last edge of the world

There are so many edges to the world
And it is a world of doors after all
Hinges which open into the depths of the twilight
Reaching out past the burning pages of the earth

Now find the secret of day in the burnt and tinted
evening air
Silence is all around inside the street noise
Find the declarations of night folded like dry autumn
leaves
In the charred pockets of shadow that fall from the edges
of buildings

Find the secret of motion as it appears in the copper sunset
Of the pedestrian maul
As it is divulged in the ledger books
Where the numbers race onward in milliseconds

Here where the archangel's flaming sword
Glances off the shields of office buildings
Now in the triumphant moment of golden light
Of gathering silence of dark and radiant dust

V

Marked, too, by these slots for the sun

Y

397

You give me the wafer
out of the air

Shapes of the lost realm

Pomegranate seed of light
Almost
Spit out past the earth-lip

IX

Hands

in the dark room
Crossing above my face
-- closer, receding –
Blades passing or

Wings
in the tunnel
In the darkness of the tower

X

Hands

in the dark above

My arm shadows
like feelers

XI

Night sky
clouds at the trees' rim

Green paths
And a dim streak of brown

Iris-reflected
The candle
Deep in the tunnel of trees

How long
must I carry you

How far
into the night

XII

Empty porch

wind in the black lilac bushes

The hour
But there is no bell

No clock
But the moon on the cracking pavement

In the distance
a car

Some people walking
and voices off somewhere

XIII

Light-grain

Far
in the blue iris of night

Evening star

XIV

My hand
on the moon

The moon
in the street

The street under water

XV

How you cry out

Silent
In the silence

O drunken
Drunken voice

XVI

Hand

on my face

Eyes

in my head

My fingers in my eyes

My eyes

O the darkness

XVII

Only true darkness

Listening at the well

Of my eyes

Only true emptiness

Touching one hand

To my face

XVIII

Cracks in the sidewalk

Like
The veins in my arm

Brushing leaf shadows
pulse

And rise away

And then
the moon

XIX

I am standing
on the street

Wind
trees

Wind and
trees

Moonlight sifts
through the leaves

There are secrets everywhere

XX

Songs
out of nothing

Breathing
From scratch

XXI

Hands
in the snow

Faces
in the snow

My hand
in the shadows

XXII

Tire scars
In the frozen mud
Filling up with snow

My eyes my nose
My mouth

Filling up with darkness

XXIII

Crows

In the bare autumn tree

Brilliant light

Over all

Tattered white clouds
in the blue

XXIV

Infinity of light

falls through the blind-sieve

The head

on the white sheet

The head

XXV

Open
the book of light

With one step
through the window

Paces
And paces in the blue

XVI

The branch past the window
Above

Nothing
Below
there is nothing too

XXVII

All these Americans
And then
slowly
like a tide coming in
The others

XXVIII

Last light of evening
a door is sealed
Just below the horizon
The another is sealed above it
It is the horizon
Light-rumors
just past the wall of night

Archangel

I

I fall
Through the end-time
Of space

The hell of
Empty night-space
Decays

All around me

I fall
Through the end-time
Of time

Halls
Of night echo
With my cries

II

Sun-occlusion
At the edge
Of the world

Earth-heart
Nearly ceasing

Now stopped

III

I am
Taken up
In the grip
Of the angel

Thrown down
In the
Scattering

IV

Halls of the late sun
Flooded with
Ochre and bronze
Copper light
Fills the square

A scrap
Of paper
Billows
Then settles
On the dimming sidewalk

[Light is filled...]

Light is filled
with points
Burning bright figures

Images

Furious, teeming
these –
millions of millions

These are the angels

Most High

Originator,
Light
out of light

Source,
rain-light
beyond the illuminated

In
the realm
beyond thought

Holy
Thy name
Thy name is Light
Your world shall come
to pass

As you will to do
and
to have it done
on the earth
and beyond
and
on the earth
and above and below –
rain bead of green
filled
with fields of wheat

Dark Elsewhere

Languages

The word
Is the single most important
A nexus which we know
From sky at sunset
Rubbish heap in the cobalt blue
Last light a smoldering above it

The pigeons
In the middle
Of the city square
Fly up in a cloud-event
When I walk there

They must know who I am,
Otherwise why would they leave so fast?

But one thing I've wondered about is,
In that bird-instant before they all fly up,
Is there a moment of indecision?
And then, therefore, a moment of decision
Following immediately after?
If so, who decides ? And on the basis of what?
If who, then is there a leader,
A pigeon group-leader,
Who gives a signal or, say,
Appoints someone to give a signal
After a certain moment? If what, then
Is there a particular case
Such that –

ARCHANGEL

THE TOMB

I

Criminal immensity
cracked vase of the immensity
ruin without limits

immensity oppresses me soft
I am limp
the universe is guilty

the madness winged my madness
tears at the immensity
the immensity tears at me

I am alone
the blind will read these lines
in their unending tunnels

I fall in the immensity
which falls into itself
it is blacker than my death

the sun is black
the beauty of a being is the depth of cellars cry
of the definitive night

that which loves in the light
and yet whose shiver is frozen
is the desire of the night

I lie
and the universe fits itself
to my insane deceptions

the immensity
and I
denounce our lies to each other

truth dies
and I cry out
that truth deceives

my head sweat-glazed
worn out with fever
is the suicide of truth

the non-love is the truth
and all deceives in the absence of love
nothing exists that does not lie

compared to the non-love
love itself is slack
and does not love

love is a parody of non-love
truth a parody of the lie
the universe a laughing suicide

in the non-love
the immensity falls into itself
not knowing what to do

all is for the others in peace
worlds turn majestically
in their calm monotony

the universe is in me as in itself
nothing more divides me from it
I hit against it in myself

in infinite calm
where laws imprison it
it slips toward the impossible immensely

horror
of a world turning round
the object of desire farther off

the glory of man
however great it is
is to desire a different one

I am
the world is with me
pushed beyond the possible

I am nothing but the laugh
and the idiotic night
where the immensity falls

I am the dead
the blind
the shadow without air

like rivers in the sea
in me the noise and light
lose themselves endlessly

I am the father
and the tomb
of the sky

excess of darkness
is the brilliance of a star
coldness of the tomb is a die

death threw down the dice
and the depths of the skies exclaim
at the night that falls in me.

II

Time oppresses me I fall
I slide down on my knees
my hands grope for the night

farewell to the streams of light
for me only shadows left
the lees the blood

I await the tolling bell
when giving up a cry
I shall enter the shadow.

III

A long foot bare upon my mouth
a long foot against my heart
you are my thirst my fever

foot of whisky
foot of wine
foot insane to lay me low

O my whip my torment
high heel that crushes me to earth
I weep that I do not die

O thirst
unappeasable thirst
desert without issue

sudden squall of death where I cry out
blind man on my two knees
eye sockets empty

hallway where I laugh in a night insane
hallway where I laugh in the slamming shut of doors
where I adore an arrow

and I burst out in sobs
the blare of the clarion death
bellowing in my ear.

IV

And then past my death
a day
the earth turns in the heavens

I am dead
and the darkness
alternates with day endlessly

the universe is shut to me
within it I am blind
consigned to the nothing

nothingness is nothing but myself
the universe is only my tomb
and the sun is only death

my eyes are the blind lightning
my heart is the sky
where the storm breaks out

in I myself
deep in an abyss
the immense universe is death

I am the fever
the desire
I am the thirst

the joy that pulls away the dress
the wine that brings on laughter
at no longer being dressed

in a bowl of gin
night of celebration
stars falling in the sky

I gulp the lightning in long swallows
and I shall burst out laughing
the lightning in my heart.

THE DAWN

Spit out blood
it's the dew
the sword by which I will die

from the edge of the well
see how the starry sky
has the transparency of tears.

I find you in the star
and I find you in death
you are the frost upon my mouth
you have the scent of death

your breasts open like a coffin
and laugh at me from beyond
your two long thighs delirious
your belly is naked as a moan

you are beautiful like fear
and you are mad like the dead.

misery is unnamable
the heart is a grimace

what turns sour in milk
the insane laughter of death.

And a star rose up
you are I am the void
and a star rose up
dismal sad as the heart
shimmering like a tear

you sigh and it is death
the star fills up the sky
dismal sad as a tear

I know you do not love
yet the star that rises up
cutting sharp as death
tires and turns the heart.

I am cursed and there my mother
how this night is long
my long night without tears

night niggardly with love
O broken heart of stone
hell of my ashen mouth

you are the death of tears
be cursed
my cursed heart my sick eyes search for you

you are the void the cinder
bird with no head wings that beat against the night
the universe is made of your little hope

the universe is your sick heart and mine
in the cemetery of hope

my pain is my joy
and the ash is the fire.

Tooth of hatred
you are cursed
and who is cursed will pay

you will pay your share of hate
will bite the horrifying sun
who is cursed bites the sky

with me you will tear
your heart that's loved by fear
your being strangled with tedium
you are the friend of the sun
there is no bit of rest for you
your weariness is my madness.

With cow dung in my head
I cry out I hate the sky
who am I to spit up clouds
it is bitter to be so huge
my eyes are heavy swine
my heart is of black ink
and my sex is a dead sun

Stars fallen in a bottomless pit
I cry and my tongue runs out
what difference that the immensity is round
and runs into a guillotine's basket
I love death and I invite it
in the butcher shop of the Holy Father

Blackest death you are my bread
I eat you in my heart
horror is my happiness
there is madness in my hand.
To tie the hanged man's noose
with the teeth of a dead horse.

Sweetness of the water
raging of the wind

splinter of laughter from the star
late morning of beautiful sun

there's nothing I do not dream of
there's nothing I do not cry

more distant than tears is death
higher than the depths of the sky
in the space between your breasts.

Limpid from head to foot
and fragile as the dawn
the wind has broken my heart

in the hardness of agony
the black night is a church
where they're cutting a pig's throat

trembling from head to foot
fragile as death
agony my elder sister

you are colder than earth.

You will remember happiness
when you are seeing it die

your sleep and your absence
are together in the tomb.

You are the beating heart
I feel in my side
the interrupted breath.

My sobbing on your knees
I will disturb the night

shadow of wings over a field
my heart of a lost child.

Laughing sister you are death
the heart fails and you are death
in my arms you are death

we have drunk and you are death
like the wind you are death
like lightning like death

death laughs and death is joy.

Alone you are my life
sighs lost
separate me from death
I see you across tears
and I divine my death

did I not love death
the suffering
the desire for you
would kill me

your absence
your distress
make me nauseous
it is time I should love death
it is time to bite his hands.

To love is agony
to love is to love death
monkeys their stench as they die

enough I would rather die
but I am too weak for that
enough I am so tired

enough I love you like one insane
I laugh at myself jackass of ink
braying to the stars in the sky

naked you burst out laughing
giantess beneath the canopy bed
I crawl I grovel to be no more

I want to die of you
I would annihilate myself
in your ill caprice.

THE VOID

The flames encircled us
the abyss opens to our steps
a silence of milk and of chill bones
enveloped us in a halo

you are the transfigured one
my lot has broken your teeth
your heart is a syncope
your nails have found the void

you speak it is like laughter
and the wind raises your hair
agony gripping my heart
brings down your mockery

your hands behind my head
reach around only death
your laughing kisses find nothing
but the poverty of hell

on the sordid canopy bed
with its hanging bats
your marvelous nudity
is only a pitiless lie

I call to you in the desert
where you do not want to come
I call to you in the desert
where your dreams will be fulfilled

your mouth sealed to my mouth
and your tongue between my teeth
the immense death will gather you
the immense night will fall

I will have made the void
in your abandoned head
your absence will be bare
as a leg without a stocking

waiting for the disaster
where the lights will burn out
I will be soft in your heart
like the coldness of death.

INVOCATION TO CHANCE

Orestes
dew from the sky
bagpipe of life

nights of spiders
of numberless hauntings
pitiless game of tears
O sun in my breast the blade of a knife

rest there the length of my bones
rest there you are the lightning
rest there you the viper
rest there my heart

let go to the wind your hair of an assassin

Chance O pallid divinity
laughter of lightning
invisible sun
thundering in the heart
dazzling
splintering of bones

naked chance
chance in long white stockings
chance in a lacey dress

frantic
with knotted bones
my heart is cold
my tongue is heavy

DISCORD

A thousand houses fall
a hundred then a thousand dead
at the window of the heavens

Belly open
severed head held up
reflection of trailing clouds
images of the huge sky

Higher
than the high darkness of the sky
higher
in a mad opening
the tracing of a gleam
is the halo around death

A heart of ice a smoking broth
a blood-stained foot
like a moustache the tears
the choking wheeze of death.

Flame of night
a severed leg
brain exposed and naked foot
the cold the pus the clouds
the brain coughs out its blood.

I'm hungry for blood
hungry for the earth of blood
hungry for fish hungry for rage
hungry for rottenness for cold.

I consume myself in love
thousand candles in my mouth
a thousand stars in my head

my arms lose themselves in shadow
my heart falls to the depth,
mouth to mouth, of death.

THE NIGHT IS MY NUDITY

The night is my nudity
and the stars are my teeth
I throw myself among the dead
clothed with a white sun.

Death dwells inside my heart
like a widow very small
it sobs and it is weak

I'm afraid that I could vomit
the widow laughs up to the sky
and tears apart the birds.

I imagine
in the infinite depths
an empty expanse
different from the sky that I see
no longer with the points of light that flicker
but yet with storms of flame
greater than the sky
more blinding than the dawn
abstraction without form
zebra-striped with fissures
piling up
of forgotten stupidities

alongside the subject I
and on the other the object
the universe
shreds of dead ideas
where I throw out crying the debris
the weaknesses
syncope
discordant cock-cries of ideas
O nothingness made up
in the factory of infinite vanity
like a case of false teeth
I bent above the case
I have
my desire to vomit up desire
O my failure
ecstasy that makes me sleep
when I cry out
you who are who will be
when I no longer am
deaf-mute X
giant hammer
breaking my head of night

ORESTEIA

Heart craving brief glimmers
belly greedy for caresses
the sun false the eyes false
words carriers of plague

the earth loves cold bodies

Tears of frost
equivocal lashes

lips of the dead woman
teeth un-atonable

absence of life

nudity of death

Through deception, indifference, the clattering of teeth, the
senseless happiness, the certitude,
 in the depth of the well, tooth against tooth of death,
tiny particle of blinding life born
 from a heap of waste
I flee from that, it insists; injected in the forehead, a trickle
of blood mixes with my tears and
 wets my thighs, minute particle born out of deceit,
out of shameless greed,
 not less indifferent to itself than the heights of the
sky – purity of the executioner, of the
 explosion, cutting the cry short.

I open in myself a theatre
where false hypnosis plays
a trick without purpose
unseemly that makes me sweat

no more hope
death
a candle blown out

...and that majestic sadness
the whole enjoyment of tragedy.

It came on
a sandstorm

I couldn't say that
in the night
she came like a wall of dust
or like a whirlwind draping a phantom
she said to me
where are you
I had lost you
but I
who had never seen her
cried aloud in the cold
who are you
insane woman
why pretend
not to forget me
at that moment
I heard the earth falling
and I ran
crossing an endless field
I was falling
the field was falling too
an infinite sob the field and I
falling

Night without stars
empty a thousand times extinguished
did such a cry
ever pierce you
so long a fall

I vomited
through my nose
the spidery sky

I am dead
and the lilies

the words lacking

and I lack at last.

The words of the poem, their stubbornness, their number,
their insignificance, retain the
 impalpable instant around the heart, the kiss slowly
 pressed to the mouth of a dead woman

And hold in suspense the breath of one who no longer is.

The clarity of the loved being, miraculous indifference, the
numberless of the light

Never to think of it again.

The lightning kills
turns back the eyes
and joy
effaces
joy

effaced
glass

Felt
hat
of death
hoar frost
the sister
of a joyous
sob

The whiteness
of the sea
and the paleness of the light
will steal away the bones

absence
of death
smiles

The body
Of the crime
Is the heart
Of this delirium

The laws of savoring
Lay siege
To the tower of Lust.

The alcohol
Of poetry
Is the silence
Dead.

In dying I would like to take
The object you will give me
squeezing it in my chilly hand

Dressed in my sweat of blood
disheveled specter woman old
your teeth the wind shall freeze them
and yet I shall kiss them
you will be dead

The depth of the night

The great star Butchery

The milk of the sky

(Georges Battaile)

THE ANGELIC WANDERER

I

Pure as the finest gold,
Strong as a rock and hard:
Nothing but purest Crystal
Shall be your mind and heart.

II

Others concern themselves about their graves and tombs,
Providing for their maggots with marble rooms.
To me it's nothing. My grave, my shrine and stone
Of everlasting rest, is Jesus' Heart alone.

III

Away you seraphim, for you could not revive me.
Away you angels all, the glimpses of you I see.
I will have none of you. I throw myself instead
Into the uncreated seas of mere godhead.

IV

I don't know what I am,
I am not what I know:
A thing, yet also not a thing;
a point, a circle too.

V

Lord, it's not enough
That I serve You as an angel might
And in divine perfection
Grow green in Your sight.

My spirit's far too small –
It's far too difficult for me.
Whoever wants to serve You
Must be more than pure and holy.

VI

To find my first Beginning,
And also my last End,
I search for God within myself,
And then for myself in Him:

To become Him I must be
A word within the Word,
A light within Light,
Godhead within Godhead.

VII

Where is my stopping place?
Where neither you nor I can stand.
In what region shall I go
To reach my final end? –

There, where nothing's to be found.
How shall I go into it?
Yet I must search past even God,
Into the empty desert.

VIII

I know that God can never live –
However brief – without me:
If I were not, then He as well
Would perish, of necessity.

IX

To live, like God, without desire,
Absolutely pure and holy,
Is something I received from Him,
And something He receives from me.

X

I am as great as God,
 And He, as small as I:
Above me He can never be,
 Nor under Him can I.

XI

In me, God is the fire,
 In Him, I am the flame.
Yet is it not the case that we
 Are inwardly the same?

XII

Just as your spirit hovers,
 Wavering, over place and time,
So in an instant you could be
 Beyond these, in Eternity.

XIII

I am myself Eternity,
 When I step out of time,
Condensing God into myself;
 And myself, likewise, into Him.

XIV

I am as wealthy as God is.
 There could not be a speck of dust
(I say this in all honesty)
 That is not mine, as well as His.

XV

All that's ever said of God
 Seems to me not enough –
God-Beyond-Godhead is
 My only light, my life.

XVI

I too am God the Father's Son,
 Beside Him for Eternity:
His Spirit -- Flesh and Blood --
 Is known to Him, through me.

XVII

I too am God the Father's Son,
 And I sit at His right hand,
His spirit and His flesh and blood;
 Through me He shall understand.

XVIII

How holy that Man is
Who neither wills, nor knows –
Who gives to God – now hear me right –
Neither his sacrifice nor praise.

XIX

God gives to no one anything,
Standing freely before all,
And so much so that He –
Do what you will – is yours in thrall.

XX

God is a merest emptiness,
Untouched by Now or Here:
The more you try to grasp Him,
The more must He disappear.

XXI

The wise might die a thousand times,
Yet even so he strives,
To gain for himself the Truth itself,
Out of his thousand lives.

XXII

No mortal end is holier
Than dying in the Lord:
Burning through Soul and Body
For an eternal Good.

XXII

There really is no death ,
Since every hour I die;
And with each death I undergo,
Life upon life I multiply.

XXIII

There is a type of death –
No new life blossoms from it.
From this my soul beyond above all else
Is constantly in flight.

XXIV

It's nothing that drives you on;
You are yourself the wheel,
Always running of itself,
That never can be still.

XXV

Accepting all without
Dividing Good and Bad,
You may keep ever calm and still
In joyous times or sad.

XXVI

God is a miracle,
His being what He will:
Willing what He is,
Measureless, never still.

XXVII

I love a single thing
Yet don't know what it is;
And just because I do not know,
A voice says 'you have chosen this.'

XXVIII

You need not cry aloud to God
The well spring lies within
So long as you don't damn it up
It shall flow on and on.

XXIX

The Soul is like a crystal,
And Godhead is its Shine;
The Body that you live in,
Their common shrine.

XXX

The Lord is like a ploughman,
The seed shall be His Holy Word;
The ploughshare is His Spirit,
Your heart shall be the field.

XXXI

The child alone
Cries only for its mother;
And thus the Soul cries out for God
And for none other.

XXXII

An abyss within my Spirit
Ever raises up its cry
Toward the Abyss inside of God's:
Which is deeper, who can say?

XXXIII

On John the Baptist

John ate but little, wore just the roughest dress,
Lived his entire life in the wilderness.
He was so pious; why so harsh, so without stint?
The greatest of the saints was the most penitent.

XXXIV

And though the living Creature
 Shall come forth out of God,
How can it be that, in His secret Womb,
 He keep it hid?

XXXV

The Rose that here and now
 Your outer eye can see
Has bloomed just so for God himself
 In Eternity.

XXXVI

Godhead is a Nothingness –
 And a Beyond-of-Nothingness.
Whoever sees in all things Nothing,
 Believe me, must see this.

XXXVII

Jesus is my Sun –
 Away with other light!
He illuminates my Soul
 And fills it with delight.

XXXVIII

Whoever His Sun shines for
 Will never squint and peer about
To see if moon or other stars
 Happen to be out.

XXXIX

Know that in the deepest spring
 The water's pure and clear.
Drink always only from that Source,
 Or else is danger near.

XL

To reach the pearl of dew
 Of noblest Godhead,
You must hold fast to His
 Humanity instead.

XLI

Is God eternal Now?
Then what conclusion must one draw?
That He is not in me
Unless He be in All?

XLII

A man is born of God;
Yet near His heavenly throne,
There stands no other Being than
His self-begotten Son.

XLIII

You must just simply Be,
And stand still in the Now;
Then God shall in soft peace
Regard Himself in you.

XLIV

Do not complain of God:
You have condemned yourself.
He did not want it so,
And this you know full well.

XLV

You say that in the sky
 There's but a single sun;
But I say there are many millions,
 Not just one.

XLVI

Heaven is within you,
 But yet the source of hell.
You shall have all about you
 The thing you choose and will.

XLVII

The Meaning, Spirit, Word --
 Are all so clear, and free,
If only you can grasp
 How God is One and Three.

XLVIII

Though Soul be inside Body,
 And both in part and whole,
Yet I declare as well
 That Body is in Soul.

XLIX

It's not enough for me
 What's known to Cherubin:
For I shall leap past all of that –
 Fly to where nothing's known.

L

In God is nothing known:
 He is the Single and the One,
What you will see in Him,
 You must yourself Become.

LI

The Rose is without Why:
 It blooms because it does,
Not thinking of itself,
 Not wondering who sees.

LII

You say that in the sky
 A single sun must stand;
But I say suns are numerous
 As grains of sand.

LIII

However much we pray,
 ‘My Lord, Thy will be done,’
He is Eternal Stillness still,
 And so has none.

LIV

Whoever does not first
 Have Paradise within,
You must believe me when I say
 They shall not enter in.

LV

God is not near to all:
 The Virgin and the Child –
With these alone He lingers, lightly, playful,
 Secret, mild.

LVI

How foolish that man is
 Who drinks from a standing pool,
Yet in whose house a fountain flows
 Where he could drink his fill.

LVII

The word Within rings more
Than from another's mouth;
If you can but keep silent,
In time, you'll hear its truth.

LVIII

When you are neither touched by Love
Nor struck by Sorrow,
Then you have changed
Your place with God, and God with you.

LIX

I am God's other Self –
In me He finds alone
What in Eternity for Him
Is fused and blent to One.

LX

What God might want
Or wish for in Eternity
He sees the likeness of it
Too in me.

LXI

Before me, was no Time;
After me, there shall be none,
For with my birth it's borne
And with my death undone.

LXII

Friend, let this suffice for now,
And if you should want more,
Then go -- become yourself the written Script,
Yourself the Lore.

(from Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubic Wanderer*)

AILLEURS

I AILLEURS

In Hiding

Under the bed one sleeps more coolly, communion of
dust-laden galaxies, and it is ours alone, dark circle
of sleep the evangel

I have sealed the bottle cap tightly and nonetheless it still
has flown – the bottle fly, so blue over the river
where in spring floods they took me to the
boathouse, starlings came to find us, exhibiting their
tails, their eyes like green crystals deep in the water

The house itself was of whitewashed stone and one round
oak tree, later we sat in the circle of shade that it
cast like a mill wheel on the turning ground,
drinking small cups of tea

Mint tea of the desert – sweet as love, bitter as death – this
is what we were told, and yet we did not know what
it was we were drinking

Through the Trees

On the second night after the rain the porch was deserted
the house was empty the trees outside were waiting
and the others had disembarked, we found them
searching for water with stones in the pockets of
their rain coats

In the hallway too the cat had left its footprints in the cool
night mist that clung to the third layer of everything

In the fire the shapes of whole continents fled upward torn
away discarded and sand grains sped up into the
chimney, a rope of sparks was being braided to drag
the night up by its hair

The wood grain shone in the logs inside the fire and the tree
rings appeared in the room spreading outward like
ripples on a pond, and the fireplace was a stone that
someone had dropped into it, throwing off fractals
of light and shadow

Catch them, we thought and waded into the tree itself, our
forms growing into each other in the confusion of
rain falling down through the starlight of the
stiffening wood, the smoke streaming, wrapping us
up, and we were rising, not burning, growing
upward into the darkness

Away

Blue estuary of her scarf in the dim bar then honeycombed
light of the loud horizon and later the marked
adornments of night, these streetlights where the
waves of leaves broke upon the trees' shore,
crashing still in the silence of the wind surf

And again you my double, and we have been here both
before, the smoke of time lingered as we floated on
papyrus rafts, this is where the evil came to us, as
we were dreaming upside down near the starlit
window

Crawl under the covers with me now, communion of soft
adhesions: our mooring lines are fastened, are let go
Under the tented night there is much closed-in breathing
somewhat like a petting zoo, and we find whole
changes of clothes laid out, dragging them on in our
excitement, like lighter fluid

We find the smooth and the rough stones from the river
bed, cool and damp with the black mud ringing
them, and the isinglass feathers of a fossil fern, and
the owl's green stare, Everything is so improbable,
isn't it? so unaccountable

Where are the provisions we had laid aside, where is the
dark dispensary with its lucid drugs, and yet I have
a presentiment already of orange and lemon peel
burnt together with nutmeg and cinnamon, of
braziers smoking with teakwood charcoal, and of
the silted river far away walked over by sunset and
sunrise, perfumes of evening and of night and
morning are gathering around us, of the seasons of

the land, of damp marshes and of the cool sand
dunes
For our tent is already like a raft of sails in the night, whose
mast rises up into a compass that is the zodiac
itself, and we are sailing far into some other ocean
now, which must have other signs and other stars

Light of Earth

The rain is plies we walk through that are also doors
swinging open in the gray wind that fills the spaces
between the trees, dark trees with wet bark that
grow up from the overturned ground, and the lips of
the earth seem ready now

The sun though shrunk to the size of a dime is the color of a
small violet, there are no clouds, the horizon is very
deep, the light is pomegranate, the moon is
delicately veined and sits balanced on the edge of
the mountain

Moving closer you see the precipice drop away, there are
small people so far down in the darkness of the
canyon, and the sounds are mixed softly by the
current's braiding waves and lights

A huge rake set on end reaches miles into the air with metal
equipment fastened to its tines and then there are
wires leading us to elsewhere, and still the sheets of
rain fold on fold, each with its special light, a brief
flash like a form of identification – blue, marine, a
shimmer of iodine, the numinous mist so green,
things seen before, not seen

And there is rain through the busy street yet the street is
still empty the people asking, Where? the grove of
trees we had almost forgotten letting down its white
leaves of paper, its soft air

Once there were roots in the soil the mossy ground or sand
the color of amber, green grass there was too, black
wet roots in the earth oiled looking, the wind around
us the rain still, yet though we've been here for the
longest time, still no one dares to go anywhere

Ophelia

Earth horizon, ancient, a mouth sucking the sun nipple, a
wide mouth blowing the sun candle out, a jaw
setting its teeth around the light, iron frame cracked
in four pieces and buried in the sky, rising through
the constellations into space and time, appearing as
green forests, as amber steppes, as meadows
streaming with horses, as fields of barley, rye, and
wheat

Sun tablet dropped into the glass of evening, and then the
effervescence of small stars, earth horizon, no
longer ancient, twisted matchbook of skylines
palely ignited at morning, sun match set down into
the river oil, igniting it, and the barges are small
stones that are living things there

There was a hand in the river, its fingers in the water made
branches ferns bundles of green hay, made orange
trees olive trees green and black and bright lemons,
made tangled jasmine and white honeysuckle green
burdock and ragged goldenrod and the laces of
Queen Anne, made gladiolas hollyhocks streaming
magenta indigo and crimson made golden secretive
walkers through the currents, the shallow and the
deep

And in the river the candelabrum of golden hair, a yellow
of plaited light, as gold as wax droplets sweated
down the candle's side – and they are there, the
apparent ones, the light hollows, the fire embers in
the burning glass, like tree limbs sweated out from
the light's storms, droplets of fire squeezed from the
light's rag, the burning drops of wax, sealing up the
eyes in the sands of her abdomen, pebbles dropped
into the still pond of her chest, ripples of mercury
shivering through her bleeding reflections, and now
I know her, now, it is now that I know her, and as
though for the first time, Ophelia

Only now is she finally disrobed, only now is this singular
action revealed, space peeled away from space, time
washed away from time, as rain is washed by rain
down the gravestone of a window

Chance Meeting

The Tarot deck shows strange in the early morning as we sit there on the floor of her little room, she had picked me up at the bar, we were the only two there and she simply started talking, her crimson silk dress to her ankles, and the music came on, it was the old song, Angel Eyes

Outside the autumn leaves were falling catching the steel needle shrapnel of late afternoon light, inside it poked shotgun barrels and long compass legs through the half lowered bamboo curtain

An old drunk bronzed in glare his glasses blanked with radiance, his empty beer glass foam-streaked glowing like some ancient electrical experiment, beaker of dusty light, a piece of crystallized jet contrail, he tips it slightly for the bar girl to take, a tiny gesture, the rest of him does not move at all

I have a book with me, and you notice it, Philosophy, you say and you touch my sleeve, hey, you say, and then you order more bourbon

Drunkenness is a different thing at different times, it might not be so bad if you didn't say anything, but then you do, you want to have a 'relationship' with me, right now, you want to show me your room right now

And so you bring me home with you, it is not a nice place, I was curious about that point but no there is no trust fund here at all, bathroom outside around the corner

through the large restaurant-like communal kitchen
not too dirty

Inside your room – thin walls of plywood paneling, high
ceiling, a sagging couch along one side, indoor
outdoor carpet on the floor

You climb crooked wooden slats up to a sort of attic where
your bed is a mattress on bare floorboards, you do
this to show me how nice it is and then come back
down

It has taken me a while to realize that you're mentally ill,
you show me art that you made, pathetic squares of
paper with paint dabbed on them, I try to feign
interest, your questioning angelic smile never leaves
you though it fades a bit, something behind your
eyes goes elsewhere, Where?

Then you take out a half empty fifth of bourbon from
beneath the couch, drinking, lying there, your bare
feet in my lap, Do you know the Tarot? you ask

Morning After

Bath water subsided down the sky's ring: hills like brown-gray rabbits hunched in the cold, green copper trees and black fields eaten away by the acid light, the fine webbing of stars was broken through, and light stung the side of the earth's face

On the main roads and on the small overshadowed side roads the signs shine more clearly than ever, they were glazed with hoar frost that gave them a kind of sugar coating or else a kind of goose flesh

The new fair's opening was like the opening up of a wound, there was a pained exertion and then a screaming, and yet it was an old wound that was being drained and cleaned, just like any birth

Voices rose in the public square, the nights of insomnia were cut with razors and heads were left hanging from ropes, these were on every balcony, professional women in black habits and in dark blue ones gazed into the depths of the alleys, a professor was bringing syrettes of morphine, a dog urinated onto the side of a garage in which a homeless alcoholic was sleeping

The methamphetamine party of the undergraduates had concluded and the girls had gone off to do ritual ablutions, one of the nuns was raped by the frisky adolescents who hung her bra and panties on an electrified fence; the janitor had to remove them, later, with great caution

Marked Deck of Time

Black artery exposed of a leather necklace, topaz eyes as bright as drops of Brazilian coffee, and her thick brown hair full of perfumed and allusive gestures, here where the light is cut through with shadows, here where they fall from a doorway or from a lamp, breaking the space around her into a geometrical pattern of memory, desire, and dream

And she comes forth from it all as though from a tiny door in your past, bearing an acorn and a sprig of oak leaves in her open hands

The lights from the highway have eaten her face partly away so that it is vague and distended, expanding like a smoke ring through the room

The two of us have come to these crossroads before, the iodine of sunset painted us, the darkness erased all our features except our eyes, which opened outward and outward, like ripples on a pond, like the rings of a tree, until we saw the total clarity of noon deep in the rain-soaked heart of night

The ash of the dusty street is like newsprint on our fingertips, and we are standing here, deep in the humming shower of hawthorn light pouring down from the streetlamp, lost in the marked deck of time

II MEMOIRS

Morning Light Piece

Morning: the windows with their shapes of snow and
light. Yellow curtains cast shadows on the walls.
Brimming of light fills the room's ceiling, a tide
reaching down the white walls.

And there are bluish shadows in the corners of the windows
where the snow has piled itself in ragged triangles,
each with the shape of a rising graph.

I get up and close the curtains and draw the darker shades.
The room seems quieter now. How loud the light
must have been.

Yet bright threads sprout like cat whiskers the from edges
of the drapes' scalloped shadow, light spokes reach
crookedly along the ceiling with filaments veining
down from them.

Lily pads of light are floating in the ceiling there, pleats and
membranes of the curtains glowing and awash, and
more light spills over the sluice of the window.

An Early Memory of Winter

Blue of the winter sky: you are late to school and no one is around. Cold white sun, and your breath goes up into an empty light. The air is clear and very cold.

There are no birds. The trees are stark and eerie in the empty street. The red fire hydrant here, and the blue license plate there. Light flashes on the aluminum edges of the roofs.

The earth is armored: there are plates of ice and scales of muddy frozen water along the sandy street. The ground is so hard, if you stamp your feet, you only jar your own teeth.

Why do you want to take your gloves off? It's too cold!

And yet you pick up a handful of snow. In your grasp it shrinks, yet your hand, throbbing, seems to expand. It hurts to hold it, and your palm is growing numb, yet your fingers still pulse inside the little ball, the heart of snow.

The Lost One

You who had wandered from my dream to walk out into
flakes of falling snow, parting the curtains, the veils
and white filmy bars, passing between them,
slipping through, then gone
You who have slipped out of my dream – is it just one of
you? or two? or three?

When I half wake, the shadows around my bed hand me a
black leaf with a name scratched in it, Whose?

Three times the dream has come, the ice has melted from
the sheets meanwhile, the brook is flowing once
again, so green and bright, the grassy cleft of
dreams out of the mountain where it always hides,
out of the spell of snow

Three times and still my final thought returns, and yet I
have no final thought, a sheaf of wheat is set across
my bedside stand, a book, a candle in a jar

When deep snow weights the rafters of the night, I open the
book wide in the yellow lamp, although its pages
now are all charred black

The candle is burning and a wind is shivering the rising
flame, stretching it up so taut that it winnows, one
by one, white grains of wax from out of it, and in
the glass world somewhere then, I see your half-
closed eyes

Passageway

It is fire where only smoke wants to be, yet it is fire; the
risen shape of light, rising still, a white droplet
drawn upward. The candle flame floats above the
collapsing chimney of a wick, like a dolphin leaping
up, suspended above the water.

Deep in the crystal bell of the glass the ringing continues,
yet memory drowns in light.

Light reaches out to capture the dark room; darkness
struggles and will not hold still. I witness the battle
of walls and of ceilings, the tremor of space.

Yet still in the glass – at the center? at an edge? where and
how deeply inside? – an opal passageway
glimmers, searingly open and blindingly shut.

What Living Page?

Night, and the rubble of forests harbors a dim bracelet of
embers in the grated page, locked amid simmering
silence. A poker, and fresh wood – then smoldering
wing beats of the draughty fire once again.

The key of a glowing ember guides me, the syllables of ash
lead me apart from the realms of faces and voices,
there where the desert lies behind me resonant with
light, watched by its lord the scorpion.

Bright pyramid illusion, haloed now and with your mouth
of blackened stone, what living page is offered to
your fire?

Splendor

Your blond hair white as wheat and burning at the
bottom of the stream, gold sand of the water's hours
opened in the falling of those other waves, unbraided,
braiding up the printed tale of light. And yet so
generous the hourglass of dreams.

Falling around me now these few stiff weavings of the
night, archaic leaves. The sifted sand fills moonlight
with a new breastplate of gold.

Your helmet of gold hair in memory completes the hollow
figure, empty, streaming with the splendor of
effacement.

III SONNETS: JEANNE MARIE

I

I remember you now after so long a time. I was thinking of you last night as I lay in bed, unable to sleep – and it had been years. I want to set this thought down as it occurred to me, as though to make clear to you the strange feeling of that moment, when I suddenly realized that it was you there, after all, as though vibrating somehow in the lamplight beside my bed, and in that astonished pause I thought of those other times, those days that could only be symbolized by looking far down the bridge's mouth through the tunnel of the river and the shooting backward into the night where one small light lies far in the distance, days that I might see staring back at me from the river's surface.

And at those times, it is true, I thought mostly of the suffering that you caused and not so much of you as you were in yourself, if I ever knew what you were in yourself, apart from the charmed association of our brief and long relationship. Somewhere there are two voices. I think of you now in that time of early youth, Jeanne Marie.

II

Jeanne Marie, and I pronounce your name as the French would, since for me you are part of that border between two worlds, the one of the remembered but yet unknown, the other of the known so well but yet still forgotten. The border is like a strip of baize green fabric down the page of an old book, and it is an ancient book, as ancient as the snows of the green fields in the winter time. And they are such long winters there. Then when ours had melted away, the long one of our non-existence, and we stepped forth out of the white floes as though from out of the white edges of an old snapshot, amazed at each other, how wonderful it was – the purple blouse that you always wore, and your lace underneath, and then your breasts pressed against my hard chest, and we walked together down the cold wet streets that were flooded with the mercury streams poured out by the bright yellow suns, the two of them, skies and trees running in them, and fallen leaves in them, drawn down the edges of the street like a border around us.

III

The moon moved through the trees so that it had black branches in its face, and the leaves were red and brown in the light, a butane light, that the moon had around it, filmy, like a bright membrane, and the night was emerging from its netting of stars, cloud stains were wiped off the sky's lens, and we looked up into it, seeing our reflections there, like the images upside down in a candle's jar, the candle being the sun that we carried in a pail between us, your hand on the one side, my hand on the other. Looking down into the pail as we sometimes did, we saw the cold rain water of autumn, since that was the time of year, the bright end of the autumn with its wood smoke and fallen apples. And a few leaves floated in the pail. But though it looked like cold water and dead leaves, it was really the sun that we carried between us, as we walked out far into the northern night. Do you remember this at all, Jeanne Marie?

IV

What were we doing when we lay there in the dark that night in the empty house? Everyone else was gone, only we were there. A draughtsman's compass was opened and two points were set on an unmarked piece of paper. This was my life, this was my memory, it was me you were drawing in the darkness with your eyes closed, your fabulous virtuosity. There was no candle lit in the room, but there were two candles lit. There was no sun in the sky, only the moon, but there was one sun in the dark room burning in the wall, its face was framed in the mirror, laughing. And at a certain point you rose up and walked toward it, stepping into the mirror as though into a pond, walking toward the sun that still smiled raggedly inside the waves. A webbing of ripples like cracks spread out from all around you like a vortex and into the room itself, as you waved to me from the center of your cracking portrait, as you smiled at me from somewhere near the sun, a smile that stayed in my eyes like an after image.

V

With you in a dark room, and I thought of picking berries when I was a child, blackberries out behind the house near the fence when it would be warm out and the sun would come streaming down hotly past the edge of brightly piled clouds and the berries, though very firm when they were unripe and rhubarb-colored, would be black then and soft and pebbly between thumb and finger, like the pebbled surface of a tongue that was alive there at my fingertips, touching me as I touched it. And some of them standing in a bright cut of sunshine were slightly warm and the juice was warm when it turned into a pulp on my tongue, and you gave me one and then the other pushing up with your chest and stretching back slightly, the way the canes would wave and flex in the breeze.

VI

Cherry soda emulsion of the red-lighted living room, and it was your sister's house, a blood tinted aquarium. Do you remember our games? How innocent they were and how ardent. There can be no comparison with any. Anyone else who reads these words can never know what it was, since youth is indescribable and love also is, and this was both. How tightly we sealed our mouths together, and though in future times, with others, those who came after you, kisses could be tormenting, in your case they were never that. How tightly your mouth was sealed onto mine, and you breathed into me steadily and fully, loudly one might almost say, and yet no one could hear. Only I could hear and only I could feel. Your breathing was the greatest thing I ever could have been given, because it was your life, second by second becoming mine, it was the thing I wanted most, that I had to have, that I still have.

VII

The glass door in the sunlight is a partition that separates one infinite thing from another one, and yet can an infinite thing be called a thing, and does it exist in the way that the door itself does? Does it exist in any way? Of course, one still steps out into the light, and the light goes on and on ahead of you, with no end and no beginning. As you walk down the street, as you turn to look one way and then another, the light has always preceded you, and when you turn back it has preceded you again. It is a constant, and you are an event. In a sense you interrupt its continuity with your density and darkness. But this must not be held against you. Taking your shirt off, taking your silken things off, I discovered you, I bathed you in the light of that day long vanished. But there must be some sense in which that light itself is still present, somewhere, for it could not have been altered or affected in any way, and if it still is present somewhere, then there is a sense in which we may be there as well – but where? – having once set our two dark shapes within its kingdom, upon the surface of its glass, like two fingerprints.

VIII

How much I still love you, Jeanne Marie. Do you remember me at all? How long it has been since we have seen each other. The entire world is different now. How long since we have been adolescents together, in ancient times. Because it is so long ago, the thought of it suggests a special privacy between us, things we could speak of with each other that no one else in the world would know about. How strange it is, when you think of it. What are the one or two secrets that only you and I, of all human beings, know, that no one else will ever know, in all the future ages of the world? Did we know, at the time, that such an unfathomable thing was given to us? What is the connection between love and thought and secrecy? Will the days of our happiness ever come back, and yet how can they? I think of you over and over again now, and in everything that is good in my life, that I have now or that I hope to have, I feel your presence, the irreplaceable gift of your beauty. I recall your face, I can almost hear your laughter once again, I can almost hear your voice.

IX A New Life

There are times when one's life seems to start up all over again, as though flowing suddenly from a new source. Streets of a blue lead color, a circular moon – luminous hex sign, a white stone with faint gray lichen on it, irradiated by a light whose source cannot be known. Seen from this distance, the breast of the moon has several small nipples. One must not try to drink from all of them at once.

IV AUTOMATIC WOMAN

I Apparition

You, with your hair full of angels, the sun up rising
through them like blood in a syringe, you whose
eyes are a steady chastisement to the thoughtful,
whose waist has all the fervor of a wasp hovering in
the sunlight outside the screen

Woman with your mouth full of teeth and your teeth full of
other mouths, with your tongue like an ant eater in
the anthill of my throat

With your eyelashes like the calligraphy of a hummingbird,
with your shell-like comb, your peacock blue, your
jade, your phosphorescent silk

You with your diamonds fallen into that abyss between
your fingers, where the skin of my back was
shredded into slivers of newsprint, you with your
clitoris of ice melting on my tongue

Do you remember our midsummer night with its copper
moon, its dark corduroy of rustling beach trees?
how it shone in wobbly diamond shapes on the
blueberry water of the pond?

Do you remember how it all came back in laughter risen
from the depths of the river or fallen in dusty
torrents through the champagne colored streetlight?

Do you remember the silence in the house after that first
time, and how the papier-mâché possum in the
moonlight crossed the dark street in front of us?

II The Possessed

Your arms are full of lightning, electricity moves in your
legs, who is that man they say, peer of the gods

But throw us in the ditch by the road: ages and ages
afterward, a tree will rise from our two skulls its
roots from two pelvises, and my hair will be leaves
once again.

And yet even so I am not ready, and who would have
thought this. I come back from my longest
wandering, so many beds to sleep in over so long a
road, my blood leaks out into the stream, crooked
veins of moisture run down the glass, and yet it's all
water, even the glass, and even the pools of my
eyes.

Your mouth is a cavern I can never stop exploring,
somewhere inside the space that your breath creates
within me I will find something more amazing than
Lascaux...

Breaking my wheat with your scythe, my fruit with your
hands, my blood with your –

III Les Beaux Jours

Mantis lover, with your huge green eyes, your skin of dry corn husks, your feathery dissecting fingers, are you preying there kneeling before me? You peel back the skin and suck out the marrow. How it flows, pumping out and out into the sands, the hourglass of your throat.

Blow cloud after cloud of fragrant smoke into the apricot light, as you lie with your fur split open.

The pit of the apricot, the half pit, gleams in the lacquering fire. Yes these are Les Beaux Jours. Terrible insect, how I will never forget you.

And now voices approach us from out of the fire, even though the fire is dead. The television floats toward us in the dark like a chunk of blue ice.

Here is the cord from the blinds. And yet what are those shapes, the dark ones, always standing near them?

IV Visit

I walk to the edge of the lamplight and then pass out
through the wall.

The apricot woman is asleep somewhere in the night and I
have to find her.

I must find her to bring her back to the stack of paper I'm
burning one page at a time, there in the corner of the
cellar.

The other ones wait to see where my shadow next will fall.
They move away quickly when I approach.

Then the open well in the yard tilts toward my gaze. Far at
the bottom, the end of the earth waits listening.
The willows are attempting to walk on all fours, the river is
still, but the earth surges onward.

The blonde one steps forward from out of the bonfire's
pages, sand colored hair and sand colored eyes,
nipples like rose medallions.

And the shadows have come forward with her like a
trembling shell.

Everywhere about her, dawn pecks at the cracking
darkness.

When I bathe my face in the river, there is only the warmth
of the fire on it, an invisible sunburn, as though
from the moon.

When I stand up it's midday. The sun presses down on the
top of my head as I walk back toward the house.

V Consumption

The night has eaten your face away until only the candle
inside your skull is visible. I open my two hands
and the fire drips down, I open my mouth and my
eyes, and yet the sting of your hot wax seals them
shut again.

Your light disappears in the tunnel. I call out and the
echoes shake down leaves from the dark, but the
leaves are made of burnt paper. I smear my breasts
with their ashes, drawing your name on myself once
again, erasing it to mere dirt or a birth mark once
again.

I draw the cobra from out of my side. It rises between my
legs, the venom is leaked through my veins, the
tourniquet twists at my heart.

Scales with eyes in my skin, I crawl through the ripple of
shadows, subtle music is alive in the ground, alive
in my ribs.

I open my hood, I open my thousand fans.

VI Creatures of the Desert

Your body in the firelight is covered with dark spaces
where the fire has tried to erase you with its
quivering rubbing motion. And likewise they say
that there are dark spots on the sun.

Dipping my hand into the pool of your stomach I feel the
sunlight rippling across pebbles and warm ribs of
sand.

I lower my face to the pool, drinking in the waves one after
another.

Then I walk away into the dark and return with more pieces
of wood.

The fire reaches higher into the night and there are
rainbows here and there along the grain.

Shadows like scorpions come forward from around the
grate. The creatures of the desert are looking for
water.

VII Drowning

The black rain falls and wets the shrunken faces in the
tree's bark. Eyes that watch and ears that listen are
drowned out by the rain and the wind.

Yet when we walk past they advise us which grave to
choose for our ritual. Who is it speaking when you
listen to those voices? And who is it listening?

You take off your dress. Your stone white armpit above me
in the copper moonlight, then your leg, and then
both of your legs are over my face.

Then you bend back further, and I bend back further too.
We both roll around in the mud. The rain is so
warm. I dip my head far under the grass, and we
awaken the sleeping ants.

The garter snake flows through my spine. A millipede runs
up and down my tongue. I hear your laughter
somewhere inside of me.

The rain keeps on, but as though from a great distance. We
both call out to each other that we're drowning, and
we reach out our hands through the dark.

VIII Cynthia

The old wallpaper flaps down strip after strip and the body
steps forth from its petals and water stains.

The moon shines in through the window. The broken pane
is like pond ice cracking.

And then she dips her face through to my depth here below.

The moon stands fully before me, its green light shining
into my eyes as I reach out for its streaming hair.

The icy lace-work of the frozen tree has wrapped itself
around both of my arms, there are braids of green
ice, and inside of them eyelids are opening.

I see that the peacock's head is buried deep under the
ground, glowing in its blue light. The sounds from
the other world blow into me like a steady wind.

Her faces are multiplied in the darkness. The entrances and
exits are opened and closed in rapid succession.

Her mouth opens wider and wider and her legs are two
torrents flowing on through the room.

Afterward the two of us go out onto the lawn. We are like
small figurines made of sugar.

The earth seems so strange to us. Where shall we stay? we
think. And we walk on toward the tree that streams
with the pomegranate of sunrise.

IX Idyll

Sunset burns small holes through the dim newsprint of the twilight.

The sun is a coal that we blow on ‘haah’, and the sparks fly up from the edges of the hill. They become the stars.

Now you hold these two much dimmer coals in your hand. They are very cool by this point, it is only because of the darkness that they seem to be chestnuts.

Then you push my face under the water of the pond, Look up you say. And when I do, I see that the moon has turned it into a photographic negative. We walk out over the water's surface nonetheless.

Passing out through the gate, we see the moon's white writing over the water all brightly scribbled. Who is it that lives here? you say, I can't see the name. And even as you do, the carp in his cloak of shadows is listening.

X Card Game

The pool of light on the table. The cards placed in it are
faces at the bottom of the pool.

Drowned images, yet existing from before the torrent of
days. Where do they come from, the drowned?

They are changed by the light which is over them, the egg
of light in the height of the dark room.

Then you place your hand into the circle to take up the dead
and yet living.

Your hand is a card in its own right, your body its own tarot
deck.

From it you have dealt out my life and my death, this time,
and so many other times. Yet where did they come
from, these cards of life and of fate?

XI Rain in the Morning

Morning and the rain came and drenched the curtains of
the opened window. Out on the balcony the tall
angel faded in light the color of blue carbon paper.

Storm clouds of cobalt blue or black ink. White mist
was rising near the earth.

Something is edging closer to the dwellings of humans,
yes, I must speak more simply now in order to
record it.

The impossible fills me like water through a pipe, like the
notes in a guitar, the impossible.

It moves beyond just past my grasp, as my hands try to
seize hold of the rain, moves beyond just past my
thought, as my thought tries to seize hold of the
poem.

It must be that I am already dead. The earth itself is now
the impossible for me, although I continue to walk
over it.

XII The Lover

You imagine all the faces at the bottom of the well. Where
does the water come from? The moon pours it in at
night, you say, but I don't believe you.

Where do you go when the sun slides down among the
fish and the stones at the bottom of the pond?

The river sings with the power of the wind, Becoming
streams in the ground, and of a sudden we know
glory.

Where do you go when the sun is devoured by black
insects? The sky is an insect head, we are eaten
point by point in the darkness: how we vanish, how
we are charcoal, how we mark each other so black!

Parts of our bodies we have forgotten, whole other bodies
that were once ours. Yes, although you don't know
this, yet still you do.

Rise from the well
Rise from the well, rise from the well

Where do you go when the insects team inside your skull?
They crawl over each other and look out of your
eyes.

How frightening you are then, lost entirely, and yet still
alive, devoured in the torture of subject-hood. And
yet still you crave it.

XIII Monologue

Who lies at the bottom of the well? I hear their voices
when the trees move a certain way, the ground itself
makes me feel their movement: piles of shells I've
seen heaped onto the beach by waves, but there are
no waves inside the ground, the voices are not the
voices of shells.

They are not my past lovers, they're the drowned.

The sun burns tiny in the water like lamplight reflected in
a cup of tea, glittering script of light never seen
except there where we can never set foot.

What I bring forth from my body is still only my body, yet
the sun holds the earth in its grip, the wind flakes
the surface of the pond and the darkness is agitated
far beneath.

Where do we go when the night is filled with the scent of
hay and grass, lilac bushes near the fence, the wet
earth after the rain, the scent of the rain itself? How
wonderfully the odors can fill the spaces of what is
not seen with joyous peace.

And now, odd companion, where does our fury come from?

XIV Storm

Windy night and the storm is coming.

The moon is swallowed by branches that thrash themselves
trying to cough it up. We can see it stuck in the
tree's throat.

Pale undersides of leaves flash white, and silver minnows
stream out through the branches.

Clouds in the sky are seeking the far edge of the earth to
throw themselves off. The moon fingers its way
through them. Something beyond the moon follows
after it.

There are black sunflowers gathered at the edge of the yard,
they are as tall as a man and yet move very quietly.
The sun burned out not long ago, and they have
come back from it charred looking.

They are made of oily rags, and their faces are battered and
scorched copper plates. Dirty streams of adhesive
tape trail down from them, empty eye sockets
dribble out tarry blood, tiny mouths scream into the
night. In the wind they all lean the same way, like
weeds in a current.

Yet inside the shadows formed by the limbs of the oak, we
open the inner leaves of essential darkness, ply after
ply. You invite me in and I follow, pushing ahead; I
call out to you, and you grab me to hold me back.

The storm opens up above us then, the moon flows down
the limbs of the tree in streams of milk, lakes of
rainwater open in the eyes of the lawn, barrels
somewhere far away in the night are broken open,
and the voices, strange voices, call out.

XV Transit

The moon is tearing itself away from the earth but
something keeps pulling it back.

Fingers of moonlight feeling for the fabric of wind, water,
earth-face, earth darkness.

The flowers of the sun, the black charred faces, their
streaming tatters -- each looking down crying to the
others, Where is the rest?

The wind pushes them on, but the earth holds them fast,
they turn their faces downward to it as though in
surprise, wonder, disappointment.

Yet inside the shadows of the tree where we have hidden,
we discover the openings of darkness, the essential
powers, the oils that work the locks, the locks that
must open and open and never again close.

I push onward through doors and you follow. You pull
back on me saying, I have passed here before.

XVI The Blue Storm

The window opens into the rain of the summer night.

Sudden white syncope of lightning, and the worlds shift
themselves deep in the Elsewhere. We hear it
throughout the sky.

Then time starts again.

The tree tops float in the wash of the sky's river, currents
snatch at the leaves -- the shout and hale of the
wind, the chaff of the rain jumps down the window
in streaks.

The night is a great hall with voices rioting, calling from
vanished assemblies.

The suffusion of clouds rushes past in its own current, the
river of the earth streams through itself.

You are reminded of how blue the tree is at dawn, of how
black it burns at sunset varnished in the red umber
of twilight.

You think of the earliest days of childhood, days of bright
gold singing, of the humming hive of the air, of
vanished light shouting so loud, of the endless
clamor of green.

XVII Aubade

The vigilant graces of our Pleiades, an aegis though
invisible now in the early sky, stand present in the
calm of your whitest hours -- morning in the quiet
house streaming with the sun.

Yet you pull the corners of the room darkly into the
twilight as you close your face of dusk, embracing
only your pillow.

But who is it there?

Cocooned in your elsewhere, your yesterday, your
tomorrow, what dream lays down its silken thread?
A lace of smoke and of shadows? Whose fingers are
at the buttons of your dress?

THE SECOND LIFE OF FIRE

BOOK ONE

BEFORE LEAVING AGAIN FOR SOMEWHERE ELSE

I

The faces opposite are themselves a question,
which in the twilight of occasional rooms
rapidly filling with darkness
are left behind for us, floating like leaves
on the surface of past time. It is these the world has
brought us.
Was there something underneath it all, though,
that we were saving for another place, or for another time?
I feel the breeze from an open window
moving softly into the edges of the moment
when the utmost of clarity, joined with the utmost
of the capacity to endure it, is present briefly
somewhere among the words I had been scanning,
yet it must have been that my index finger, impatient,
had gotten somewhat ahead of the eye
which had been following it, and this explains it all,
the consequences which were about to follow.
They didn't though, of course, and yet
we felt them piled high like a tilting tower
of playing cards – weightless, like all suspicions.
Then – and how astonished we all were – they toppled
harmlessly
around us, like the shadows of the leaves
beneath the trees outside. Yet outside was itself
the point we had been thinking of for so long.
This was the problem, it was nothing

that had gotten in between our words,
like something stuck between your teeth,
as we spoke to each other in the most carefully modulated
tones.

It wasn't an interpersonal communications thing at all,
but rather on the back of every card
as in the lines of the hand – which one?

the left? the right? –
was written that one word, *Outside Outside Outside*,
gaining significance with each repetition,
like the shadow of the hand that holds a candle
as it advances closer and closer to the wall.
And yet each one of us must put his hand
into the lamplight briefly, watching the shapes
we broadcast upward on the ceiling. It is this way
that we know each other, though only as we are right now,
never the places we have come from, origins so far

removed
as to be less than moods, merely fragments of strange
currencies,
coins fallen into the well, dredged back miraculously to the
light
flecked with black mud, or tossed into the fountain for
good luck,
then anxiously retrieved. It was the second most surprising
thing,

therefore. How is it we had come so far
and never seen each other naked? As at the beginning,
beneath the waterfall of days, the high rocks
pouring and pouring out their misting rainbows,
coruscations of the common elements – light and air
and water. Was it really you there after all,
behind the veil of falling light and mist? –
a kind of rainbow in its own right
and yet heavy – punishing, crushing in its impact.
And yet it's in this way I know that it was really you.

You have the marks of it still on you. Not a specific mark,
rather a general impress on your being.
You never see it for yourself perhaps.
You *are* it in a sense. And yet I recognize you, yes,
since it was me there too. It was me on the other side
of the constantly falling chains. No matter what you say
(and how many times you've tried denying it)
I always feel this deep responsiveness
between us, the after-echoes of the cataract.
The most surprising thing of all, though,
is how -- so often on a summer night
when everything is hot and still and the moon shines down,
a full moon so startlingly bright, and the crickets
are insane and numerous in the bushes -- when you go out
for a walk,
so many people have their lights still on,
and as you walk along it can't be helped
if now and then you watch them for the time it takes
to pass their house -- not going close to windows
or anything objectionable (or actionable), just simply
watching from the sidewalk the snatches of brief common
things
they happen to be doing, not stopping either
and, no, not even slowing down -- a mere walk past
with gaze not absolutely blinkered, curious
to see a head, an arm, a someone staring into a computer,
anything, and then the most surprising thing
is how -- somehow -- they seem to know you're there.
The street completely dark -- the nearest streetlight
half a block away, or out -- there's no way they can see
you.
Yet hands appear adjusting shades and blinds,
a face sometimes, amber lit against a curtain
with a night light somewhere in the depths. How is it
they could know my eyes were there at all?

But sight must be more tactile and intrusive than we realize.
Imagine as you walk the leaves are watching as you pass.
It must be this way, too, that we remain half-conscious of each other,
blind seeing stored up deep inside the roots, as then we grow
to separate the leaves of space, or finally to disembark
toward deeper privacies hidden in the unpainted sections of the canvas.
So this then is the thing I need to talk to you about –
gold glamour that you wear, and the look
of time deeply unfurling all its sails for the blue
regatta of your days. Tell me again how we
bent toward each other in the pose of fervent listening
which yet was knowing in detachment, subtly compassionate
with hints of similar routes held to by means
not incompatible with deeper, half-archaic scrutinies.
Yet only now do I begin to take the measure
of the charmed association that has held us near these surfaces,
as reflections are held to the thin skin of the mirror,
never allowed to sink in even a little way.
And how far down one actually *would* plunge
is attested to in the pages of antiquity.
Yet Alice wasn't trying to cause trouble,
it was all just a mix up, a category mistake,
as she strove against the power of reflection itself
seeking the impossible embrace with her long lost twin,
the dark unearthly counterpart. Yet reflection
is not our problem, and the surface is always concealed
somewhere in previous depths you'd crossed unknowingly,
and that's the real issue. It comes out once a month,
twelve of them a year, more often if you want,
you pays your money and you takes your choice.

And yet these pages that I find myself among
are just those surfaces the depths of the dreaming city
have brought up to me, as we waited by the side of the deep
well listening,
or the passing busses splashed us with rain water.
They're not for free, of course, but payment is requested
only after years, at times postponed indefinitely.
Perhaps you've seen such people sitting around in
restaurants or in bars,
the small mark hidden underneath the tongue
the only indication of their desolate idleness, the dereliction
of dreams.

Do you remember the time when every secret
or encoded conversation was about drugs?
And yet that time is past. They are no longer
part of an arcanum, a hushed alternative hidden among
the spires and high battlements of the bright aggressive
world,
but now instead a vendible commodity. In the self
which is a sign-using and sign-creating matrix,
(like a kind of goldfish bowl)
which yet is itself a constituted sign, there is resident
a desire for altered states of awareness
which themselves bring about further uses
of those same signs. Is there a language of the intoxicated?
Am I speaking it to you now? And yet I am only writing,
I am only – now, for you – a written script.
Yet the intoxication of writing is so great
it must conjure for itself the illusion of a speaking voice,
a presence – itself the greatest of illusions
and the greatest intoxication – there in the words.
(Nakedness is presence, though, which everyone must
crave.)
And is there a community of the intoxicated?

When did the idea of it flow away from the inundated
world,

leaving these charred remnants, these small twisted
structures?

And yet my imagination cannot even now give up
the image of small secret bands of wanderers,
small groups of the initiated, secret societies,
or, in my more nostalgic moments, the lamp lit circle of
friends.

Where has the brief promise of my spring
left me, where am I among the tilting shapes
of the buildings, what crack am I supposed to have
crawled out of? As I did, someone handed me
the black leaves of the confidence trick,
all that is left in the autumn as it inclines
toward winter. I wear them wrapped around my heart,
like broad leaves of cured tobacco, perhaps I should be
entirely wrapped up this way, a sort of walking cigar.
But in the land of gloves, do not think to look for a hand.
And it was with my one good hand that I greeted
the strangers who approached me, with my one good hand
I guarded the radiant jewel of the pineal eye,
with my one good hand I caught the drops of rain
falling upward through the black sieve of the fire escape
so many flights below, and with my one good eye
I watched it race back up into the clouds
and the clouds themselves zoom backward, flowing back
and boiling away into the rim of the horizon.
Yet still the bed sheets were hanging on the lines
as I turned from the white screen of my amnesia
to the open crack of sunset, the only possible opening
between the sky and buildings, through which
the crimson light flows over us, like blood from a small cut,
a paper cut let's say, (and they always say
that head wounds bleed the most.) For this reason

the city is consumed with twilight creeping up the
buildings.

And yet some shadows are a means of concealment
and possible escape. Yet maybe we should all rush out,
expose ourselves to the fullest measure of the sun's decline.
(Come on! Let's go!) Already I am more than halfway
there.

But what more could there be between my silhouette,
however dark,
and the radiant disarray of clouds, the profusion of
evening?

What more could they be hiding there,
the invisible ones who yet determine what is seen?
In the interval between my partial waking and my fuller
sleep

I listen to the cars that pass me in the street below,
(For I am down there too, walking – always walking.
What is it that I'm looking for, or whom?)
even as I lie here, my last coins on both my eyes.
The dying away of sound creates a sort of tunnel in the
mind,

and down it you could pour the days, the nights, the
incessant traffic,
the flocks of clouds in the bluest of all your skies,
your friends could go there too, and every single one
of your degrees, certificates, the works...
and finally your last few loves, clinging
like brown leaves to the bare branches of winter,
whatever they might have been, your last few loves.
Were they even people, though? A silly question you might
think,

but sometimes at the end of our festivities,
we're not all that particular – the arc of sky
across one corner of your neighborhood,
some buildings framing it just so, perhaps you never

thought of it that way, yet in another sense, perhaps you
 did,
 or it was working on you all these years.
 You feel it now grow richer, an unexhausted thing though
 small –
 not even small but personal, particular. And mortal too,
 that has to be admitted. You bring mortality to things
 that cannot be exhausted in themselves, the infinite
 becomes the perishing and mortal in your glance,
 while yet remaining infinite. How can you stand to do this?
 Yet nonetheless you do. You make a kind of bubble of it,
 though,
 a glassy envelope inside of which the secret
 transformations
 are always happening. And then you pour them out,
 refilling it all again the following day. Perhaps
 a few shards stick there now and then. You watch them,
 as with children when the first frost of the season
 makes decorative isinglass on every pane –
 breathed-out mists and vague incisions like the small
 handprints of leaves.
 The tunnel hasn't swallowed everything as yet.
 You've rolled it up like paper into a sort of scrolled spy
 glass
 and watch me from your corner of the universe,
 a spy glass or a megaphone. Hello down there, ahoy matey.
 It isn't much, but I appreciate your concern.
 Still in the evening, when I'm riven with anxieties,
 the fear of growing old alone, or with so little money still,
 my mother's cancer or my father's stroke
 my only plausible inheritance, it helps to have companions.
 I'll lose them all of course, just as the poem says,
 Lose all companions, even yourself at last.
 Is there an alternative? I laugh to think of it.
 I laugh into the sky, the blue illusion
 shielding us from everything. (Is everything the word?)

I laugh into the clouds at sunset turning gold
and cindering to ash and indigo far down,
I laugh into the icy surface of the mirror.
This is the face I have to kill. This is to blame
for everything. If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha.
This is the bubble that I have to burst.
Remember twisting out your loose tooth
when you were a child? I'm not a child anymore.
Yet in the mean time we can float along,
blow smoke ring after smoke ring into the winter light.
I like it sitting by the window where they keep the plants.
They hang down in their pots from ropes
as the smoke of your cigarette makes twisting loops,
cloudy curdlings that spin and drift, a little funnel
like a maelstrom, a luminous amoebae pulsing once
then fading, a wispy and collapsing man of war,
a tiny galaxy floating in one corner, dusty with hazy light.
Speaking of haze, there's so much smoke in here.
Yes, it's yours truly, fallen under the table in a coughing fit.
Yes, I'm turning blue now, yes thank you, oxygen, I'd love
some.
It's little things that mean the most. Ah that's better.
And afterward the two of us will stagger out
into the winter night. Do you remember when we got so
drunk
we started chasing cars the way dogs sometimes do?
In blue-glistening snow six inches deep we skidded
stumbling,
bellowing and barking after any car that stopped
for very long at a traffic light or stop sign. Skidding, wheels
spinning,
fish tailing just a little, they were slow in taking off.
That's when we ran out from behind the tree
and really did our best to catch them. They always got
away.
What would we have done if we *had* caught up to one?

(Yes, this actually happened.) The moon was full (of
course).

the air was absolutely freezing and the sky – the color of an
old Noxema jar,
that cobalt blue, around the moon – was high and
absolutely empty,

no clouds at all, just stars down near the rim.
The dark streets zigzagged, black tree trunks
bounced up toward my forehead...and then
your mittens on my neck... (what for?) as laughter
dribbled from our frozen mouths. A brown and leafless
bush

sand-duned in bluish powder tripped you up,
and you lay there calling me so many names.
A snow-puff numb against my face – I threw one back at
you,
our hilarity so vaporous and loud, devoured by moonlit
silence.

Then I was swimming through a wave of white.
It wasn't cold, but dim and wet, and then
I sunk in further, stepping through into the morning
and my dormitory room. White walls and sunlit blinds
make
trellised light climb up the other wall. Who are you,
loveliest?
as you come from the other room, then slipping from your
clothes.

Who are you, as you come from the other world,
that other dispensation of time, your life?
Both older and younger than I am, who are you, loveliest?
You bring me lemonade (so hot outside)
and cantaloupe slices cut into small squares.
The afternoon light shines in through dusty curtains
and your skin is radiant and soft and smooth, perfect and
imperfect both.

Who are you, loveliest? with your eyes whose clarity
is both a challenge and a realm of peace.
Your hair is complicated, full of perfume, full of shadows,
full of months and years. Only now do I notice
how many different voices you can have.
You are not singular but many, and I glimpse the others
who inhabit you. It is they who make you beautiful.
Who are you, loveliest? But surely I will never know.
And do I really need to know, to recognize
the faces hidden in the floral patterns of the old wall paper,
stained with water seepage? In the dark my flashlight
shows me where the plaster has flaked down.
The hallway's floor boards creak beneath my step.
Dust is in the air, the smell of mold and rot.
Looking out the window, I wonder is it the snow
that's falling or is it the house that's rising?
(Or perhaps the earth itself): upward upward upward.
Yet is there anywhere to go? Or is it like a bubble
in a spirit level? We float up for a ways then
bump against –
quite harmlessly – a mysterious, an invisible barrier,
the curvature of the dimension that we're trapped within.
You could say there's no way out, but really it's not that.
The rules change when we're halfway through the game,
or maybe we ourselves lose interest in the outcome.

II

In the sand dunes on the beach there is continuous
movement.
It is not the movement of the mind scanning an expanse of
shore,
it is the multiple beyond all multiples, the absolutely
manifold beyond all calculation. How to keep some of it
in the clearing of these concepts, their minor markings,
their ambiguous relations? With every gust of wind
a veil of sand is unfurled momentarily along the surfaces
of several dunes. Blue water, silver water –
the markings of white caps are clear in the transparent air,
sharply luminous in the sun. The water is a field of motion,
like the beach; light plays upon both sea and sand,
and in the evening the dunes take on an amber tint,
the surface of the water becomes shale. And yet one is
aware
of what is never visible, what cannot be described,
belonging neither to things themselves nor to fixed
relations
but rather to differentials and the flux of differentials.
Walking out among the dunes the wind blows sand
into my face. And is it I who feel the gritty surface of the
wind,
the small grains sticking to my lips, my hands?
Sky of empty blue, is it really I? Wind-crossed tormented
dunescape,
what are you hiding in your reeds? What waits
beyond the edge of the horizon? The sea sound echoes all
around me,
then subsides, is still at unexpected moments,
then returns. Which is more startling, the sound
of massing water or the silence after it?
The sky goes dark, the dunes take on the color of charcoal,

the reeds are faint gray lines. Then everything is black.
The waves wash over me, dark water surging, foaming up
around my knees. Thousands of miles away are hurricanes.
Far down, the ocean floor is shifting even now
with seismic changes, molten magma boils in the earth.
Above, the stars are numerous, precise, set deep in the
hypnotic sky.

How long must I have walked along the shore?
What waits beyond the realm of mere appearances?
How can I flee from them? How can I claw away the mere
shell that I am?

The street is actually a rebus: words and signs
combine and recombine as we pass under them.
What is it they shout down to us? I mean
I get the message but I wonder what the meaning is.
And yet the surfaces of buildings, too, are a sort of
language,

the street a dark yet burning cryptogram
mutely suggestive of another consequence,
like tarot cards. What is the mystical body
that these streets comprise, whose outlines they encode?
Back in the bar, yes I'm here again, can't keep me away,
and I like dark places where I can really get in touch
with myself, with my inmost secret thoughts (you know).
And now it's raining out, it's raining on the window pane,
but though we might complain at times,
what a wonderful thing the rain is actually.
There's a news stand on the street outside,
a kind of shed, and the rain falls down onto the roof
and onto a lower roof made of green plastic
which protects the rows of newspapers set out.
Then there's a grated poplar tree nearby.
I watch the rain come down on all of it.
It strikes each surface in a different way
and with a somewhat different rhythm:
right before the tree, and actually all around it,

it's like a very fine aluminum mesh being lowered at a
 steady rate;
 in front of one side of the shack the drops are more distinct,
 and there's a gutter that runs along the edge of the shack's
 roof
 and the water that flows down from this is slightly braided,
 luminous like steadily dribbled mercury –
 at times it seems to be an icicle hanging down.
 Well some of that's by Francis Ponge,
 a really fine French poet, I recommend him highly.
 I changed a few things (for the worse, no doubt)
 but the subject matter – the rain, that clear on-streaming
 reality,
 is what's important anyway, not who does what.
 Sitting here, I watch the raindrops running down the glass.
 I pick one out, observing as it ploughs its way
 downward through that surface which is itself a kind of
 world –
 with fields, lakes and rivers, a transparent
 and liquid topography of the vertical. Yet a raindrop
 does not have a specific shape or border, it just flows,
 gathering and dispersing itself both at once,
 yet the self it gathers and disperses is only
 the gathered of a moment since, the dispersed of a moment
 later –
 then vein-like tributaries fork downward
 without warning, like lightning in the night sky;
 the single drop is divided by hidden currents in its past,
 absorbed by another, both travel onward a ways until they
 burst
 in a Pollock-like dribble and three-streamed bleed.
 Then there is a difference in the lighting.
 In the glass world it is multiple, colored at times,
 coming, as it does in our world, from beyond,
 but this time through the ground,
 if we consider the pane of glass a ground.

Imagine if all of us were lit from underneath
 by lighting streaming upward through the earth –
 (Would we then make floors and streets transparent too,
 so that we would inhabit a kind of huge glass-bottomed
 boat?
 our structures themselves transparent, the world would be
 transparent),
 light a radiant and diffused presence
 illuminating everything from underneath
 or perhaps at times streaming up powerfully all around us,
 clothing us in foot-lit brilliance as, dramatically
 illuminated, we cast our outsized shadows into the sky.
 Speaking the language of the heights,
 we discover spaces of which we had not known.
 We are up there in the sky, the clouds, or elsewhere
 on the numerous screens we also live within
 which yet we've simply absorbed into ourselves.
 We are our own screens, now, here, in the region
 of clarity, and of the instantaneous. Here it is us
 enjoying ourselves, and watching ourselves enjoy,
 at the peak of sovereignty. Somewhere
 in the misty streaks I have seen it all.
 The surface of the glass is filled with a blue gray light
 and continues to hemorrhage water as I look at it.
 Beyond, there are dark hauntings
 that pass through so mysteriously fast
 attended by sounds that by themselves
 create the concept of "distance." For there really is no
 distance;
 this is one thing the window has taught me –
 times, moments of illumination – some harshly white,
 then crimson streaks, an area that's green, red, and orange
 by turns.
 If society were spread out like a transparent surface,
 what would we see flowing into what?
 Yet it cannot be a surface – glass, I'm told,

is actually particles, yet all surfaces are really particles
(which yet are also waves). What if we saw the street
as waves rather than as particles, rather than as a grid,
rather than as a field or a surface or a war zone?
Yet a wave is occurring somewhere, *in* something.
Are you riding the wave or drinking the water?
Are you drowning in the water, breathing the water
as the wave is passing over you? Or is it many waves?
Are there many pools of water? But surely
they must be globes, these infinite unnumbered worlds
of water beads, yet circles too – outward and outward,
downward and downward, reflecting the shimmering
concentric circles
of your face here in the sentences I've just been writing,
thinking now,
where my thoughts meet yours, our two times running
together.
Imagine stepping through the curtains of the rain,
as through all other passages, then out into another life.
Imagine riding in a bus as the rain comes down outside.
The night is empty all around, the dark the darkness of the
countryside,
and only isolated lights of farms turn slowly past.
(You remember as a child sitting in the back seat
as your father drove you through the autumn night,
or lying in the seat well looking up,
watching the dark trees pass there upside down
in streams along the convex surface of the windows.)
The ragged shapes of passing trees emerge, the bus goes on
and on,
deeper and deeper into night; how totally you are absorbed
in the motion of the road, the tiny distant lights,
the movement of your window through it all.
Your life is absolutely private, all your own.
Remember now that woman in Amsterdam? You saw her
through the window then met her, later, half a block away.

She took you to her room, and what good English they all
speak,
hardly any accent at all. They seem American
with yet some indefinable difference. All sorts of
magazines
lying around and a large pile in one corner,
and she actually did have a candle in a holder of some kind.
The marks on her arms looked like bruises at first,
and then her naked body in the shivering twilight
of the candled room – candled, yes it was rather like an egg
in a way, a dark one, the candle flame inside instead of
underneath
and then her breasts were so startlingly soft
(nakedness is always startling though). Then the moment
nearing the flame itself, and drops, like hot wax, falling
where her navel had been pierced with a small ring.
Afterward we lay there for a while,
and she was strangely talkative; as you might know
there was this slanted rain coming down outside,
I could see just past the window shade's near edge
rain falling like blue chaff past a gray streetlight,
then it was heavier, and heavier still, and I could hear it,
a kind of frying sound, on the street outside,
and I lay there listening to her voice in the dark room,
her answers that, relatively candid though they were,
seemed to skirt gingerly around places, names, or dates,
so that they had a kind of rootless floating quality,
and her voice went on and on as I listened to the past
flow into and around the present in the deepening pool
of the dark uncharted moment, the night's illimitable now.
But why is nakedness such an overpowering experience?
Do you remember that time we took a shower together?
We had never seen each other's bodies before.
There are times when you wonder what beauty really is.
Is it anything at all? You glimpse it at moments

but never can be sure. And maybe it's a drug like any other.
Sometimes in the evenings now the silence in the empty
house
presses in and down upon me, and they say that far down in
the ocean

the pressure of the water is so great
that it can crush even the strongest steel hull.
Sometimes I feel that the pressure of the silence
all around me becomes as great as that, and then
I want to shout or whistle, sing – do anything –
to break that silence. I never do, of course, and even if I did
it just would all come rushing back in an instant
like the darkness when you snap a light off.
I feel inundated in the silence, and I imagine
huge and empty structures extending upward over me
just as I sit right here – spires towering high up into the
night,

whole citadels of emptiness, vacuity and death,
the true cathedrals of non-being – massive, weightless,
oppressive and unreal,

balanced on the endlessly multiplying instants of Now,
the eternal present of my stupefying boredom.

You know I have to admit I really hate not having
a beautiful young body to look at and to touch.

And my boredom, the endless hours and seconds of it,
is like a quagmire I've sunk to the very bottom of,
there to remain forever. I feel like a crustacean of some

kind,

some sort of bottom feeder, a crab, a flatfish,
sunk to the absolute depths of isolation,
of my frozen, lightless inactivity.

And yet there is always beauty everywhere,
and yet I hate it. Yes, I hate all beauty. I can't help it.

If I were younger then, yes, maybe then I could – I don't
know,
sort of rouse myself somehow, try to shake myself loose,

try to compose again, to hear again, to breathe, to live –
 for a composer hearing is like breathing.
 it's living, it *is* life, hearing music in that mysterious
 dimension,
 the inside, the inter-voice, the voice
 among all the other voices, the only beautiful one,
 the single shining thread of gold among the plastic and
 copper wires.
 Yes, for a musician that's the real moment of true life.
 If I were younger, if I were still alive,
 I maybe could try again, and if I did
 it would be hard, you know, it would be very hard
 and the only thing that gives you the drive, you know
 there's only one thing that can do that – beauty,
 the love of beauty. You love it, yes,
 love in the sense of wanting to be united with that thing.
 It's impossible, of course, and yet that's what you feel.
 As on an evening, a crystalline evening in October when
 the sky
 has that infinitely deep cornflower blue
 and you gaze and gaze into it, you want to drink it in so
 deeply
 with your eyes, you want to *be* that luminous color,
 that far empty sky. That's the love of beauty that I mean.
 If I were younger, I could try to have that all again.
 I could try to take that infinite impossible longing
 into myself again. It's painful, though, it's very
 very painful, to hold the infinite inside the finite.
 Beauty is infinite and your mind is finite,
 and that's the reason that it's terrible.
 It's really torture experiencing beauty
 and transport as well. But you get tired, very very tired
 and after a while you can't quite do it any more,
 and then you sink, sometimes before you soared,
 you floated unbounded in the stream of your desire,

but now you sink, you sink and sink until at last you're
 dead,
 like a stone at the bottom of a well,
 and nothing changes for you then, it's gone,
 it's really all quite gone, and this is the reason
 that I hate all beauty: I have to. I was devastated by it.
 So then it was just the way that certain moments
 move from being so keyed up to something that of its own
 free falling will
 shades off to richer nuances and a deep design
 coming secretly and quite unceremoniously forward,

 like a large pile of paper, someone's precious manuscript
 let's say,
 collapsing in charring honeycombs and silver flakes
 around a core of liquid-looking poppy-colored flame
 as we jubilantly burn it out back beside the dumpster.
 Then, through the flames, an unknown face appeared,
 someone who had joined the group before the rest of us
 had really introduced ourselves, first names only though of
 course,
 you know how these things are, and you really *can't*
 be too careful these days, I know you've heard it all before,
 I know
 and you're a woman of means and independent too and
 blah blah blah
 I know and so am I but I'm just telling you we're here to
 have a good time
 and whatever but some of these guys will start to get ideas
 like they own you or start following you around
 calling you and all this kind of thing so then this other guy
 is just sort of *standing there* and I'd noticed him before
 but this was different kind of weird because the I don't
 know – etiquette? –
 I suppose is that you don't do that no no that's right what?
 Oh really? No? You're kidding. Oh my god.

And so of course I was watching him and then I thought
Well what the hell and so I did and then you're kidding no I
mean no I mean
Yes I realize I know I know I was. You were. I was. I was
so stupid
What was I thinking? I said this to myself like two minutes
later.
But in the evening the long shadows reach across the yard
from the tree and from the wooden fence, a deepening of
the air and of the light
that reaches toward an opening, a meticulous
transformation
as though of everything you are, an inward darkening,
as we might think of it, not without justification,
and yet it's nothing but a new and stringent realism,
a literalness that's like the touch of something
absolutely clean and cold, like metal, or like total
rationality.

III

Pain is the only door that opens on this stairway
where light is falling, a collapsing chain of golden
possibility,
collapsing, therefore, with a certain sureness,
a certain beauty – spectral – rungs inverted, the ladder
smoldering with that aura peculiar to the unapproachable.
And yet it is lovely to see it dreaming in its dusty radiance,
there in the empty air, aslant the white wall
and the narrow wooden stairs. You step forward into the
light.

For what reason? To speak, of course. And yet
the actor doesn't want to say his lines, not really,
he doesn't even know them. No, it's just
that he was drawn to the light itself and, trying –
literalist that he is – to grab it, he stumbled in here by
mistake.

Yet when does acting shade off into martyrdom?
This is an arrow. Now do you see my point? But seriously
folks,
who are you loitering there in the darkness,
and when are the boats embarking for your shores?
How I wish that I could leave my tiny island
for those places filled with a more essential clarity,
beyond the stuff of landscape or desire. For I, too, love that
which is luminous,
and here, how strange, and how ironic, I have it poured in
torrents down all over me,
the deluge from those buckets, the boiling cauldrons
hanging there.
But now it's too late to be helped. (Here there's a black
out.)
Reversals, foreshadowings, the dark trees flowing toward
you

through the headlights' funnel of illumination
 as the landscape, a dark fluid, is poured down into it.
 Where is the threshold you were searching for? –
 whose serrated edge you wanted for your own,
 to feel it there against the skin of memory
 as though it were a blade, yet then a new conception arises
 out of mist and smoke, and what had seemed irrelevant
 becomes the pivot on which days and nights begin to turn,
 and in the process, though freshened briefly by a gust of
 hope,
 you dutifully start in removing those things you won't be
 needing anymore:
 a glove (that's nothing), a finger here, a hand, but then the
 cold
 moves higher and the incisions are more serious.
 Days of the desert, nights lying on the sand, you think of
 St. Jerome,
 and that which comes of passages must also be put down,
 committed to a written script again, if not to memory,
 passing through all languages, emerging to the other side,
 in the membrane of miraculous appearances –
 and here you step through veil after veil,
 (trampling on them, getting them all messed up,
 and you know she's really *really* going to be pissed,
 those were her favorite ones, that deep blood red,
 saving them for something I suppose).
 But how will you step out again?
 Where are the lights of the city you must wander toward?
 Who is it you might meet along the way,
 and which way must you definitely take
 no matter what directions you've been given,
 no matter how many directions you walk off in?
 Where are the chroniclers who warn you, (or warn of you)
 and the honest citizens whose bones
 have since been poured into the walls and thoroughfares?
 The desert is a haunted place though St. Jerome has left,

translated too no doubt, yet the structure which remains –
study and columned walkway, the courtyard with its dim
and twinkling fountain,
the whole thing, silent on most nights and so remote –
has to be shared with the haunting and vestigial lion,
who paces the time of his captivity in the tale
the length and breadth of the desert,
resting at evening in the shadowed colonnades.
They say that if you walk into the sand dunes on a starry
night,
the earth will seem a secondary thing, an afterthought,
and you see it from the standpoint of the emptiness.
Yet it's no more than a landscape, just as your body is.
And we had thought so often in outmoded terms
like "life" or "here and now" or "then" and "over there,"
and certainly to live the same story as someone else,
albeit unacknowledged, is a sobering experience.
Again and again I've placed the same sand grains in the
same bottle
and still they haven't grown at all. I must be doing
something wrong.
The surface of the desert, though, is mere detritus still;
it's important to remember this. Yet it has its points of
interest –
scorpions casting broach-like shadows in the evening,
their dusty carapace the color of tar. They seem to have no
real face,
and are known to be cannibalistic. The nine-inch centipede
is fascinating too,
often the color of ear wax, and in its motion surprisingly
rapid, like a roach.
As with roaches, too, the head is horrifyingly precise in its
awareness,
seeming to possess more than mere intentionality but actual
intelligence.

Let's see, we've got your gila monsters next and then the
sidewinder
making its cursive yet disjunct figures in the sand,
a calligraphic text the wind revises to a single page.
Translation could not happen, though, without a rock
creating a hard place.
Or so we're told at least, by our evening visitors.
But is there any reason to believe those whose whole
existence
is this trade in rumor and supposition? Tentative in
movement,
wearing rough and yet complex attire,
their eyes so beautiful, lithic and so much larger than our
own,
yet none has ever acted but with the aim
of setting confusion in our texts and currencies.
To this end they speak without exactly opening their
mouths,
casting their thoughts directly into yours
like a pebble shattering a moonlit stream.
Their favorite game is played with pieces of dried bone
on a target-like mandala. They are neither men nor women,
and we suspect they drink each other's urine. Still,
it's possible to really get some work done here, no
distractions,
girls and bars and all that kind of thing.
We never really know what the project is about,
though finally we do, of course, but in another sense.
Later you might think you glimpse a pattern to the text
or to the desert itself. (The desert is full of patterns, having
so little else.)
Sometimes residents awake from sleep, rushing to record
what they had seen or heard in that other realm,
"The other courtyard," as we refer to it. Yet no one ever has
success in this.
And I suppose I hardly need to add

that more than one has wandered off into the wilderness
at night, just slipped away, out of despair at not
recording it,
or else at getting it too well and finding it was nothing
really.

They hide themselves among the dunes
and we find them later – weeks or months it often takes –
desiccated, weightless, and translucent, like a dry cicada's
shell,
(Is this the fabled entity? you think.((Is entity the word ?))
and bury them in the copper colored sand.
But since we're trading stories, one of our older residents
remembers sitting on his patio one evening,
his matte in his hand, when at the very limit of the desert
plain
a single dot appeared. In the time it takes the evening to
become the dusk
the rider had approached; then standing off a way,
he made shrill squeaking sounds, a kind of mockery
perhaps,
or possibly his alien language. Yet nonetheless
our friend perceived this as the challenge that it was.
They met out in the middle of the plain, before the
emptiness of night,
amid the emptiness of earth, beneath the numerous faint
stars,
their daggers in their hands, and tangled with each other
warily,
two mortal spiders exhausting between themselves the
finite web,
the geometry of battle. Then when an obscure balance
momentarily appeared, in that instant which they both
could recognize at once
they both set down their knives at corresponding points,
and with identical gestures
switched their places, each picking up the other's.

Yet in the dawning light the color of rusty tap water
 our old friend saw that his opponent and his counterpart
 had the face of a cicada. Horrified, he ran back to the
 compound,
 crying out, while the other faded, an apparition of twilight,
 with the coming day. Nothing was ever found.
 And yet our friend has never been the same. Well,
 anyway....
 I sometimes ask myself just what would we *do* with trees
 anyhow? –
 here in our complex paradise where we avoid each other in
 our narrow slots.
 And the game really isn't about winning.
 (Slots are insatiable though, they *never* get enough.)
 Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you really
 understand?
 Or is the language that I'm using a flammable, a terribly
 inconvenient thing
 quite dangerous to the user and *pfffft* there I go?
 You didn't like that little crack about slots, did you?
 No, I didn't think so. Well what about crack, ha? What
 about that?
 But in the twilight of occasional rooms, after she has spread
 her legs,
 after taking off her pants after picking up all the quarters
 that have fallen on the floor
 all right I admit whore jokes ok ok enough and then to
 make things worse
 he goes and puts in all this crap about prostitutes and
 Amsterdam
 and this guy has been in Amsterdam like my rear end.
 Well I mean, let me rephrase that, but no you're quite right
 Cindy
 from your mid-western hub of solid values,
 you, life-affirming woman of the plains, there with your
 apron

wiping your work-roughened hands on it even now,
as I wallow in disreputable idleness. Ah well, I confess,
the glass is shaking in my hand, will I have the strength
not to raise it to my lips? Cut, cut, all right I have to admit
I never was in Amsterdam, there never was a prostitute,
there was always only you, my little corn-fed something
something...

reader jump in here and help me out a little. What word do
you know that rhymes with – oh wait, no rhymes here? Ok,
well that's a change. Well hell that makes it real easy.

Well shucks ma'am. So anyway that stuff about the
prostitute was fake.

I humbly apologize my humble Americans fellow

Americans I mean

and I did not inhale and I want to make this absolutely clear
so that even in the darkness you can read my lips,
what are they saying now and here and if there never was a
whore in Amsterdam then who and where and when?

Where have I been? Dear reader,
only you can say, for it is you who see me here, albeit I am
never here.

And as the day moves outward into its most luminous
spaces,
where I have never yet set foot, where none of us really
has,

although the feel of that single afternoon so long ago
when your father's fascinating friend

who seemed to inhabit a social, economic, and professional
context

unplaceable in your seven year old schema – being no
one's father,

not a doctor, not a policeman, not a priest –
did he even have a job? -- yet how prophetic his untitled
existence

now appears to us in our retrospective cinema – a little bit
 new wave,
 some faintest scent or aura from Belmondo's cigarette
 smoke,
 (didn't his girlfriend look a little like Jean Seeborg?)
 now as we add our numbers and subtract our numbers,
 writing down our name on various dotted and solid lines....
 He took us for a ride in his convertible, the day was high
 and bright
 and running like a kind of stream, so crisp and clear and
 blue,
 the sun was yellow, white, or merely radiant, depending
 on how you looked at things, the wind was absolutely fresh,
 the day was like a luminous adventure we had just arrived
 within,
 setting ourselves inside of it yet blown quite wonderfully
 along.
 The top was down and it was beautiful. How great it was!
 Where do you find convertibles like that these days?
 Do they make anything the way they made it then?
 There is a floor beneath the social realm
 and objects sink beneath our organized notice, and yet
 they lie there in the dim light, and we trip across them,
 wading through
 to reach the third floor or the seventh floor going through
 and out the back or popping over, swinging by where it is
 not the dead
 but other habits and the necessities that organized their
 days –
 their days of blank injustice – that detain our thought.
 Why are there streets? Where do they come from? Were
 they always here?
 What about that little courtyard where four houses
 share a few trees and some grass? That has a different look.
 Left over from another time you maybe say,

and yet it's in our time. Or is this, too, another time? And
yet you know it's not,
there can be only one concept of production, of
consumption,
there can be only one world, at any given time.
In the evening when I walk across the public square
and the earth has started to withdraw its bruised and
abraded surface
from the light of day, from the attentions of the wind,
from the rupture and liminal contingency of being visible,
and the air itself is altered with a copper tint in the far
distance
and then, more close at hand, with a violet or a dusk-blue
tone,
when in the region of transition from activity
to something guarding its responsiveness in darkness
and fallen leaves, I walk beneath the bare and still-wet
trees,
these living things just lately risen from the earth,
and I wonder how many days I still have left
to breathe the scent of wet grass here, and then
at just that moment a flock of crows so clamorous will
spread into the sky
and then alight in the dim gray branches of a nearby maple
tree,
the portions of myself I'll never see again
I put away into a special place; portions of the world that
are invisible,
belonging to the past, these also I put there. Yet the evening
flows
with gold sand bars of cloud into its final consequence,
the earth turns further around into the unknown,
becoming still more unknowable itself,
and if it is, then I must be as well, you never can be
absolutely sure.
Yet even as I say this I look down at both my hands,

catch sight of my face by chance in a store front window.
 The momentary haunted look is there with its peculiar
 hollowness,
 its dark transparency and emptiness still cauling me an
 instant before
 the I-am-looking-at-myself stupidity and blindness
 shut things down. Yet you can never tell the kinds of things
 that still might happen even now -- the special types of
 trees
 you've never seen, an unexpected trip,
 and still, even now, that one overpowering affair, not quite
 like anything.
 Imagine how it might be, the kind of bedroom she might
 have,
 the conversations, the private jokes that no one else will
 ever know about.
 But nothing was intended as a guarantee; living in the
 margins
 of our technological society, not persecuted really,
 yet part of a despised, mistrusted element, a vaguely
 disturbing presence
 dealt with by looks askance and the shuffling of our papers
 to the bottom of the pile, harmless things enough,
 (they *would* exterminate us if they could,
 of course, but rules are rules) we've tried developing
 alternatives
 and strategies. It hasn't worked, but still we've fallen into
 crevices and corners
 here and there, shifting from one hand hold to another,
 not yet crashing through the net of smoke and lenses
 anyway,
 picked up occasionally by special arrangement with her
 majesty,
 temporarily employed for crypto-biological experiments.

But stepping back from all of this and figuring it quite
plainly
in the larger scheme of things, we reach up for the bus stop
signal,
trying to be recognized as wanting to step down
among a different set of platforms,
holding the secret on a slip of paper at the entrance ramp.
Then in the dark wind tunnel where in simulated flight
but actual friction we disgorge our most important products
onto the painted runway lines (I've always liked take off
the best,
and landing after that, when the earth comes back to haunt
you
like a thing you haven't seen in quite a while),
with the hair of my former self blown back into my face,
the floor is opened up beneath me, and the earth,
the luminous green dial of the earth is naked underneath us
like a clock.
We wait for all the forces to align themselves,
we feel the strange exhilaration – is it flight, this
weightlessness?
Is it soaring that we feel? Or are we merely falling?
Then, at just those moments when the sky
is moving toward us, flowing past, flowing around,
like water parting from a prow, and the earth is flying up
to meet us like a target, we reach in through the key hole
past the still wide open door and feel the tiny foot prints
rush away into the darkness and the running sands.

IV

At some point from the desert of my twilight meditations
I awoke inside another harsh alternative,
a flat and empty plain, some kind of broad grass land,
the sky a very high white blue,
at first a few thin alto-cirrus clouds,
other denser cloud groupings gathered over time. The earth
itself
seemed different here; as though it were a scene set,
you wanted to look round behind the edge of everything.
Each object had an aura that suggested other purposes:
the grass was not just grass, it was a sign of something else,
the clouds were not just clouds, the dirt itself
had to be doing something, and the ground
seemed to be floating just ever so slightly off the ground.
It seemed incredible, and yet you knew quite well
that this was happening. Feeling around inside myself
it was apparent that the place had managed to convey
one thing at least – that one was not expected to be there,
no one had expended forethought on our presence
neither were we targets (that we were aware of anyway)
for the intentional uses of signs systems.
This was itself a fascinating circumstance,
and novel too. Think of how seldom
that would ordinarily occur; even if someone
plopped you down somewhere in the middle of the woods
to make your way back by yourself –
you're out there all alone, yet even then there's usually
some little thing intended just for you
or anybody able to decipher those particular semiotic
nudges.
Let's say you've got some Wriggley's Spearmint Gum
in your pants pocket, or you've got the old Swiss army
knife

your father gave you way back
when you did that great father/son thing
in the boy scouts or whatever it was.
But a knife's an implement, and an implement implies a
hand,
and is, in certain respects, itself a concrete sign.
(Isn't there something like this in Heidegger? –
I said, "something like" There's no need to be so fussy
here.

This is poetry.) So now you see
the kind of highly unusual, perhaps unprecedented
circumstance this must have been for us.
We all had walked in naked on the final scene:
here, now, a world of some unknown kind,
a species of affliction in a sense, or the general form of it,
discovered for the first, or final, time
and we were either very early, impossibly so,
or else extremely late (and this was equally impossible).
Just then we noticed a small house in the foreground,
a concrete bunker rather than a house, nearby a single tree,
no garden, though, or anything like that.
Rather than being a structure for inhabitants,
the house had no human purpose to contaminate
an alien purity shining visibly around it.
And was the light the substance of an illusion, a mirage,
or was the illusion the thing which gave substantial
existence? –
to the light which seemed somehow itself
to cling to objects rather than falling
as a product of the sun, which was not absolutely visible,
only relatively so; that it was moving could not be verified.
Yet out of it came birds, flocking in the sky growing
steadily deeper.
Some were alighting, disappearing underneath the waves of
the grass
like diving birds beneath the surface of a vast green lake.

Then, after an indeterminate amount of time, it all was
absolutely clear:
the idea of a person was present everywhere
in the sky, though nowhere visible, the abstract outline
and conceptual scheme, though not the visible illusion,
and every moment was both true and false
and likewise none was true and none was false.
Then, if the descent of violence, its propagation on the
earth,
were in itself the dark thread flowing in the fabric's stream,
would it be possible to break the multiplying networks,
the fabric's lines and spaces, the webs of the sheer descent?
Can the spider turn upon itself, realizing that it is itself a
web
and that the web's a spider of a different kind?
The rough spines of the grass were like a sort of spider leg
pelt
waving into the humid light, and onstage everything
is flowing past in all directions, since there is no camera,
so illusions of whatever kind always seem
absolutely right, appropriate, and not by merely fitting in a
place
but only by creating that very place itself, the idea of
causality,
of space and time inside an indefinable region,
therefore, maybe not inside but rather linking forth
a transient constellation, time-points from here and there.
But now there was a "here," and then a gradual departure
from the present life, as when your mood changes
and, really, you really no longer feel very good,
the symptoms you had thought yourself so well rid of
now suddenly return and the project takes on a darker,
grimmer tone,
no longer helping things along the street,
the light, the air as you flow into it,

but bogging down and deadening and narrowing.
And yet it was this, the desire to touch the limit of the
world,
to be a kind of sexual outlaw, that really sealed my fate,
apart from the bright disruptions in the distance of the sky,
near where it started to become another thing,
the visible image of the unattainable, the final token of the
lost.

Yet how these private images can change the very texture
of the radiance, the second life of fire.
It wasn't the same way when I looked again.
But now the terrible eruption has occurred.
It isn't what you'd thought, rather it was this other thing.
You know it when you see it, like pornography,
the violent root choking her repeatedly, thin lines of grainy
video
like water flowing past, like sand, you think of wood grain
coaxed and questioned into fluent shapings
by the working hand, and I came back to the empty image
on the screen
which yet had somehow disguised itself as landscape
although in a still unorthodox acceptance, an investiture of
sorts —
the feeling of the day in stasis, the light not going
anywhere,
the battered woman's bruised up face is visible on the
television screen

WHICH IS A LANDSCAPE the light does not really
touch her.

You know it isn't really touching her **IT'S FAKE**
but renders her observable, she wears a business suit
and one eye is swollen almost shut, yet what has been
repeated
can't necessarily continue to be repeated, and rats are
rushing over
the dried blood, the severed finger lay in a white cloth

wrapped up and blood had soaked it almost all the way
 through;
 white cloth and a deep cadmium red blood stain, a deeper
 than poppy crimson
 and women hanging in the barn from beams
 their dresses tied up around their heads, their faces
 with burlap over them, the picture, though, is oddly
 cropped
 as though the photographer were interrupted having *seen*
everything
 the camera itself I mean, and yet debris continues to pile
 up.
 The wind is driving everything, the bunker not a final
 place,
 although it is a landscape too and landscape must mean
 that which can be walked upon like a woman's stomach,
 say,
 just as an example, or the side of her face perhaps.
 But the wind continues, it is not from any likely source,
 the clouds in the sky are flowing opposite, as though in
 flight.
 It is a curious thing, a vector like a triangle pointing
 in an opposite direction. But again on the threadbare screen
 the woman's face is like a condensation of grief.
 It is an inexplicable thing. I have seen this somewhere, I
 know.
 Then entering the house, the bunker now, you realize
 it has been used for things you've never had
 even the most remote experience of. You know
 you can't imagine it, your eye, though seeing little,
 strives to see even less. The light possesses total clarity
 now,
 illuminating just the four bare concrete walls.
 What is that on the table? that mattress,
 what kind of thing is that? – the light a kind of silver dust.

Having stepped through the rain, the hail of electrons,
the surface of the screen, as through all other surfaces,
we stand at last in the place of darkest origins.
Yes, here it is, now what do you think of it? *having seen*
everything

You yet have not seen this *having done it all*
Well there was that conference in San Francisco
then Lilli and I decided to do Club Med I know it was
absurd
well I mean this guy was gorgeous no NO English
I know it was insane oh what the hell no no no no
Don't even joke about such things he'll never know.
And what actually have you done? And now the strange
men enter,
they bind the woman, an actual one this time
rather than a sandstorm of electrons, they bind her on the
table.

They like to have fun doing this, so one of them
has brought some beer, the others open theirs and drink.
The first man though approaches her, eventually
they all are finished with her, she isn't moving any longer.
Then there is a black out. Luminous markings
like a sketch made on the night itself with radium,
glow tape, a moving as of shadow specters in the wings,
the theatre is haunted, although empty, a wind
is blowing through the tall grass plane
which seethes and flows in the darkness just outside.
The wind comes in as though from an enormous distance,
perhaps it is a cosmic wind, an interstellar wind
that shakes the theatre before our eyes –
the walls begin to crack, the lights come slowly up,
then cut to black, even the radium sketch marks disappear.
The men, all four of them, are staggering beneath the
weight
of shadow hands which press them down into the floor.
In the night a single point of light is lit above the grass,

it grows into a wave of horses ridden by a troop an army an
infinity of women –
amazons. The walls of the theatre collapse, the women
walk in through the walls, their horses saunter off into the
audience,
become the audience themselves, the books are piled high,
at what was center stage the fire reaches up into the night.
The men are killed, dismembered, their bodies thrown into
the fire,
the actors take off their costumes, the audience members
step out of their horse rear ends, the fire marshals close the
theatre down,
the landlord sells the place, it's now a video arcade,
rapists and torturers collect their pensions. The single
and original woman then returns, crawls up from
underneath
the ashes, black streams and smears of wet ash, oily
smearings on her face,
the sky is growing slowly blue, the high clouds reappear

UNDER A NEW SUN

Outside the house, the bunker, there are several trees
that fill with tiny birds or are they rather locusts? Woman,
now strange creature wandering toward the city of a
thousand years.
The oil derricks scattered on the plain, though still,
the remnants from the other time. And then the man
appears,
he crawls out from beneath the pile of charred texts,
the floor boards of the stage lead off like sight lines
to infinity **FORGOTTEN** then vanish in the distance never
touching anything.
They are astonished at each other, it's a momentary thing,
a trick of light, the clouds amass and darken, the oil
derricks wait,
the two approach each other, they're the only two,

the first touch only fingertips, they have not spoken
nor do they attempt to speak, they touch their mirroring and
open palms,
their mouths touch briefly at the lips but then slide deeper
in, each opening into each, he gathers her buttocks up,
she tries to climb up and onto him, they lie down on the
floor,
clothes are shed instantly as though they were never there,
his penis now inside of her, the two of them still smeared
with dirt
as though they had just risen from the grave, a steady
working of her hips at first but then a harder riding before
long,
the climactic moment melts around both of them, she falls
forward onto him.
It's a job like any other, though, that's what I always say to
people
who ask me what it's like, and yet I have to say it isn't like,
you know,
that anyone could do this sort of thing, teach here. You
know I've always felt a kind
of kinship with these other areas of life we know so little
of, the fountainhead
of inner structures that just kind of spills it all over the
place, and it was
like really wild I mean like *really* wild, I was there and
Derek and the others,
they were all out on the patio, it was dark, the night was
like the depth of possibility,
the times I know that what is going on inside me *is* the holy
in itself, in all its purity, and then it's like I just don't
question it,
I don't, I just like go, and then I thought about the time this
guy,
this really cool professor I once had, he like spoke Japanese
and everything,

he could talk about Milton Yeats and Joyce and all this
 stuff, and you know
 like one time he said he thought an enlightened selfishness
 was really the best thing.
 Well it's like, you know, I think that too. I mean, you
 know, it's you
 That's it here I am I'm a girl in this society I mean I have
 certain rights
 I'm sorry but I do and if someone doesn't like it well fuck
 them.
 The first time that it happened...I must say I don't know if
 this
 is the way to put it really, suddenly she was there...
You kind of get into it little by little. And one day you wake
up,
and there you are. I was asleep actually. And in my dream
 I was in a sort of tunnel, standing there but also walking,
 drifting rather, and there was rain all around me, in the
 tunnel.
 And a vague light. And then there was a face at the
 end of it,
 but not really. A voice perhaps. But not really. It was sort
 of....
 They say this place is strange. In old times they burned
 witches here.
 But I've heard, I've read actually, there's a kind of fad
 thing going on
 with all this. Kids dressing in black, pretending to drink
 each other's blood, all this. Christ, what bullshit. I read this
 article about these kids,
 chains, all dressed in black, real pale, dark circles under
 their eyes,
 all this kind of thing, and I woke suddenly and at first I
 knew he was there,

and there was a shadow over near the drapes, my heart
pounded so,
I almost spoke aloud, so sure I was, but then they'd done
something
like sacrificed seven cats and three dogs in some graveyard
I think it was in Seattle or maybe in Germany – Munich?
One of the dogs was a shepherd and they'd...
they'd sawed its head off, with a chain saw,
and I saw the picture of its head lying there near a
gravestone
and its body about ten feet away. It said
they'd used animal tranquilizers to knock it out.
And then it was her. She was just standing there, near the
drapes.
Her expression was so...odd. Both shy and bold. Afraid lest
I become angry,
also embarrassed at herself. And yet there was something
else
*But the thing that always seemed to me, it was like people
think of it
as a sort of joke or something – not a joke really. They
think that it's a game.*
*Yeah. They think that it's a game. In a way it is, you know,
really.*
*You're playing with...it's sort of interesting, it's not like
you're swallowing a pill
or drinking something. Smoking's kind of normal too I
suppose.*
*But this is something you put it right in your vein. That's
different.*
And then she spoke, almost inaudible at first,
I couldn't even be sure of what she'd said,
and then I knew, and then she said it again, very softly,
*yeah and like I read somewhere scientists like back in the
old days*

*would try things out on themselves. It's kind of like that in
a way.
Like an experiment. The thing of it is...it's wonderful.
I don't know how to describe it. You sit there,
you watch your blood in that little tube, and it blossoms
there,
like a flower. The first time that I saw my own blood there.
I sat there and it was like someone had wrapped me up
in this tent or something, like this warm feeling all around
me,
not just in me, but like all around me, and then I saw more
clearly
in the darkness this strange look in her eyes,
and then I asked her what she wanted and she said my
name again,
and then she approached nearer the bed, but she was
different now,
and then I realized, and why I hadn't noticed before I don't
know,
perhaps it was the darkness, but suddenly I saw
and I still remember seeing the cats and the dog there,
the cats were just these kind of shapeless things sort of
scattered around,
one was draped over this gravestone,
I remember it looked like a lady's fur stole or something,
just this limp thing, but the dog seemed like it was still
running,
its body was just lying there on the ground, but its legs
had this look like they were still running and I just sat there
staring down at the little tube of crimson that was stuck to
my arm like a leach,
and I just thought, how beautiful. It sounds sick, I know. So
anyway,
yeah it's like there's all this like a fad -- people,
especially here in this town, you know, trying heroin. Cool
thing to do.*

*I read somewhere someone was saying it's the climate.
That it rains so much.
Like a kind of a cocoon I guess – all the rain, the clouds,
people like it after a while,
they feel less exposed. Kind of like when you were a kid in
gym class?
and you weren't any good at baseball, but that's what you
had to do.
So if it rains, then the game's called off. I think that's it –
people like all the rain.
They feel their life has been called off. And that's what
heroin does too.
I remember the first time. She had put her wedding dress
on,
and I said to her, Lilly, why do you have your wedding
dress on?
And then I realized, as she came closer, that it was really
my wedding dress.
What are you doing? I said. The police were standing
around with their flashlights,
it was night, when the picture was taken, and the red blood
in the patrol car headlights, and I just sat there and it was
like
I sort of floated out into a kind of runway or something, like
a long tunnel.
And then she answered me, but now it was her normal
voice,
she said, I love you. Just that. And it was raining in the
tunnel,
and there was this soft peaceful light over everything.
And I couldn't stand to look at the red...meat of the
animals,
the dog, where its neck had been cut, that raw hole there.
And I said Lilly come and sit near me, and she did.
And so I just put the magazine down. And then I threw it
out.*

And I was over near the sink, and there were tears.
I couldn't help it, I know it's stupid. And she was still, and
I held her.
And I just like sat there... like totally...still...inside, but also
I was walking,
sort of drifting, the whole time, through this long tunnel,
and the rain was coming down.

The glass was filled with strange light. I'd never seen
the sort of space between the files of blue and small designs
that seem to be lowered from the top
as though a film were being shown there
or a curtain slowly unfurled a silken banner
announcing the space where the summer brings its blue and
crystal,
a diffusion of many hours into a new dimension, a deeper
and more lasting plane,
which is a rule that we've established here
for when the world reflected is so much less appealing,
only curiously so, and yet by means of it
we see the underside of light itself as it streams down
moment by fleeing moment through the doors
that someone keeps opening every morning,
closing again every night, and how I wish the two of us
could just kind of hang out sometime I know I know you're
married
well I am too no to tell the truth I really don't think she'd
mind.
Do you think your wife would? I don't know, it's
complicated.

I used to think it would never be anything I'd want to get
mixed up in
but now the more I think about it, it's like
the other side of dreams is always the part
you have to be most curious about,
like looking around the corner of the picture
just before you've drawn it, and then the other time
when you and I were sitting in that other bar,
the other place, isn't it funny how they all

have that name these days. Was there ever a time they
didn't?

And the rain kept making shapes like – stalactites is it?
or the other kind? down and down the window.

The heavy rain, I've never seen it
quite like that before, and you didn't seem to mind at all,
not really, although the place was very smoky
and they say it isn't good for the complexion and so forth.
But you turned to me quite simply, almost candidly,
and said you didn't mind, you'd rather just sit there
and wait for the storm to pass. I don't think they ever do,
I remember thinking, though I didn't say this at the time.
I should have, though. It was just one of those moments
you wish you could revisit in reality
since you do so often anyway in your head.

But oh well I didn't, I don't know what came over me.

The way to go forward is by not trying to.

You have a problem when you begin thinking
of the next syllable too long. Not thinking too is an
alternative,

though not a solution. Rather we have to tell ourselves
as we near the entrance to the tunnel (watch your head)
that amusements are people too, and yet none of it
must be taken too seriously, certainly not to heart.

That's what my grandmother always said.

All right I admit, I lied; she never said anything like that.

But warnings should be posted in more prominent places

I always like to think, otherwise it's counterproductive.

But think of how it is, of all the subtle clues and hints
by means of which you try to figure out

whether this other wants to sleep with you or not –

the way they don't respond to any of your e-mails

or it takes them almost a whole week.

They always have some very polite excuse of course,
then there's the glance that won't quite meet your own
or else the quiver in it of – is it of *amusement* ? –

there in the shimmering moment of meeting and passing in
the hall.

But in the streaming sunlight afterward, as you walk down
to the corner –
you have to stop in at the pharmacist's, there's something
else

you have to do, you know, you keep forgetting –
the ways, the means by which it's done
become more mysterious as you realize
how numerous they are, every gesture at each moment
seeming to have this echoing significance, a radiant
penumbra,

the aura of primitive acceptance or rejection.

But then you realize, looking at the roof
of some building as it flashes in the sun,
that no one really is ever in control,
they just want you to think they are.

They aren't though. The day, the space itself, the light,
the overwhelming power of this body of desire
is like a sea we all are borne amid, bathe in by day
and drown in every night, and drown in finally.

And yet it isn't held in common, is it?

Since so much is given to the fortunate, and to the unlucky
nothing.

At any rate, the next day comes, the returning thing, the sun
that we know does not regard us and which knows nothing
of us,

but we've been taught to think of it as human
and even the most fleeting metaphor
seems to have something of that lie embedded in it,
but the mind, you know, that is to say my temperament,
I really don't know anything about the mind,
but there it is, it's only how the moments
flow through that tiny part of me I recognize as myself,
like sand grains sifting down through that narrow cervix
in the hourglass, the mind still has to have

something to connect to, some transparent thing
like plastic wrap enveloping the whole.
I'd like to envelop your whole or whatever.
That was whole I said, whole, I'm really not that crude,
anyway I wouldn't say that to you, not here at any rate.
Wait till we get outside, and it was outside that was the
question
I'd been thinking of so long, as though far back at the
beginning
before we'd come along into the scene
or even I myself alone as usual blundering in here
on my way to somewhere that I can't recall,
perhaps I glimpse it every now and then, perhaps I don't.
It's autumn now, they still burn leaves here
just the way we used to do. It's been ages since I've seen it.
And yet out here in the provinces things are so curiously
slowed down.
I walk out now, tirelessly, out into the waiting autumn
evening —
and here, here, here, here, here I am.
The inky color of the clouds that flow across the sky,
like the hair of a medusa, long and thick with serpents,
the flashing eyes of portents, the opening, the advancing
of an underworld, fills me with thoughts that are not
graspable
entirely of some catastrophe approaching.
But gathering darkness accustoms me to darkness,
and slowly I grow calmer with the thought of night.

BOOK TWO

THE OTHER FACE I AM KNOWN BY

I

There are times you really don't know
what you mean, thoughts flow inside or somewhere near
the spatial configuration that your breathing
animates or, putting it rather quaintly perhaps,
inspires. You must have noticed sometimes
walking through the grounds here,
how the mausoleum, despite its ornaments
and wrought iron spiky gate, will seem to float
almost entirely free of contact with the earth,
and bathed in a blue gray moonlight
look like a structure of cigar ash or pumice stone.
And surely you remember how it was when we were
children.

We would play hide and seek, and everyone would hide,
but there was always one who had to wait
with his face pressed into hands or forearm –
sometimes you'd press your eyes so tight
you'd see these lemon slices floating in a seething black
(it must have been a habit from those air raid drills
when you'd survive the nuclear attack by piling coats up
on your neck, pressing your eyes so tight
against your forearm – they say that soldiers
witnessing – is that the word? – the Bikini atoll blast
saw their own forearm bones as though x-rayed)
and so he'd stand there with his eyes shut tight
feeling his forearm slightly damp with sweat,
although it was beginning to get cool –
the purple evening coming sooner and sooner in,

ears beginning to sting with actual cold
as night approached, blood beating in his temples,
cheeks all flushed. As though
he had been nailed to the spot,
he had to stand there, still, while everyone else
departed, calling to each other through the twilight
across fences and garden hedges and the low hills
of empty fields where the sun was almost set,
and down among the cemetery plots
some one or two would always crouch down low
among the large gravestones. Then it would get quiet.
Were they really gone? Is there, at times,
a resonance in being? I hear the bell at mid-night:
once, and then no more. The silence rings out,
though, long afterward, concentric circles
like the ripples on a pond, outward and outward
crossing surfaces of silence, the bell re-echoes its past
moment,
which falls away far into the remoteness of lost time;
its future, now its present, (quickly becoming past)
ringing silently (because now past), its present, then its
future,
silent yet sounding clear. The virtual is real
insofar as it is virtual. Those who are gone are really here,
those who are here, are not. Do you remember
when we walked out, silent, in the summer night?
You walked into the river with your dress still on.
The water was so warm you said,
I watched it clinging to your form, your white dress
like a cloak of beige concrete you had been breaking free of
for some seconds as you waded back
then shed it on the grass. It lay there, a dark collar
you had bent and sprung away from,
tossing long hair back like a cat-o-nine tails;
your breasts were flattened in your arch,
your hips wide as your legs set wide apart,

your skin was copper in the moonlight.
I knew you had become my mother then,
though in another sense. I knew
that I was someone else for you, not someone else perhaps,
not simple and not many, rather singular,
and in my singularity you sought some access to the past
and to the future both, attempting to slow
the passage of your life. It had been going both too fast
and also sluggishly, we knew this as the field between us
changed into your bedroom. Then you cut me,
I began to bleed, you spread my blood across your stomach,
took ashes from your ashtray and made insignia –
secret, dark, and beautiful – across my forehead.
These were our days of freedom, such as would never come
again.

How I adored you, O my precious queen.
In the white days which have befallen me
how I have searched my entrails like a spider through its
web,

night falling on my dark designs, yet they
were the things you gave me. How I adored you utterly,
how dead I now must be, never to live again,
never again to feel the moth wings of your skin,
moonlight of your whispering face above my own,
delicate softness of your hair, its tickling points,
its falling shadow lace; and now I realize
how precious was the time, brief time we had.
Things would have not continued long, of course;
we know this now, and yet one never knows,
for knowing is the afterward of life, the objects
littered in the drawer, the photographs you may have kept,
and yet you don't know where they are right off.
Passages of fear show me my face again
and show me yours as well, but this time in the water,
in the dark and dim and vague. Night had come toward us,
breathing, holy night, we circled drawn inward

then flies up in a tiny manic spiral. And I turn out the light.
 There is a contestation in non-professionalized
 expression, in whatever medium it occurs. By this means
 creativity destroys and then renews itself; in visceral
 similarity there is revulsion; in our being-with,
 contagion; by contagion and infection
 we distort each other, by gesture and by compulsion,
 by our speech and by our silences, by expression,
 dress, behavior. Violation and violation
 without end, without beginning, without hope.
 So then the doctor in Havana gets this call, all right,
 You know in Cuba they've got these casinos
 you wouldn't believe these girls oh yeah oh fuck man
 jeezus really I am not kidding I didn't even see him there
 and then we're like I am not joking you did not I did
 you did not I did on the pool table I couldn't help it
 this guy is like all over me all right so then and this chick is
 like
 yeah you know yeah I saw her before she was like with
 but what I fundamentally do not understand Miriam
 and they asked him would he see this patient a woman
 who'd been subject to You know they don't do it to them
 down there
 do what don't play dumb no really what cut them Jennifer
 god you are you're kidding haven't you ever seen one like
 that
 in Europe they don't either really yes really
 do you like it better it was like this guy was fucking in my
 face
 and I I don't know I just her mouth had been subject to
 procedures
 we'd never seen a case like this mutilations yes
 but this was something else her mouth
 this says he comes in here and asks for another week
 that fucking guy comes in here this says he does
 you think I'm kidding this says he does look man

no see you look had been not sewn up but as it were erased
she had no mouth her face no longer a human face
surgically modified only a small hole had been left
for liquids to pass through when is a human being no

longer so,
no longer human? How is that judgment made?
So I said Tom you know these rates are unstable
You know this downtown area -- he stops me
in the middle, I haven't even finished, the downtown
is going to be transformed it's going to
undergo an absolute I don't know what, and so
I told him I said and these were my exact words
to him, I said, George what have you paid
these people for they're both very large projects
I saw the floor plans the architects Sandy knows one of
them

two of them nice guys one's a woman in fact
I think they're a couple nice people interesting
very smart very bright very sharp I said Tom wake up
Memory requires many voices, it calls forth many voices,
or, rather, calls forth braids and streams of voices
and then, as though unhappy with just that,
takes to itself the clothing too of images,
until we think that it *is* these images.
And yet they are remembered still,
they have their power only because they speak,
albeit silently, in another dimension, another time,
another way, the way of elsewhere, yes pure elsewhere.
Do you hear me as I speak? even as I speak? even I, even
now?

even speaking? Do you hear, following the path
of elsewhere, following to the edges of the room,
and then around the floor five times on your hands
and knees. The bed was there, but it was no longer on fire,
and so they picked it up and placed it outside,
using first one window then the other one,

another necessity, an invisible one,
a current linking them, the invisible stream,
the present, opening itself to gagging, vomiting the future
as a cat a hairball, flows through and past itself,
re-establishes itself but only to deny itself again.
The sand pours through the sieve, like waves striking the
beach,
they all get through, flow through the barrier of time, the
permeable –
the margin of the beach, light-drenched,
darkened with the radiance of sea-foam, sea light
and the sound of water, filling the drowned ear,
the sabers of the noon beat through the water and become
the harp strings of illuminated depths,
green depths and blue, then deeper purple,
cold with a stony coolness, mushroom white your fingers in
the dark.

Do you recall that wonderful afternoon
we ran into the waves? the hydra of the water
we chopped at with our empty hands,
shouting our names into the empty sun,
calling aloud into the crowded privacy of children's games.
It was just you and I, the others didn't count,
had no idea of the monsters we were slaying
in the uproar of our bodies. Time was the burning glory
deep within us, hotter than the sun.
Do you remember the brightness of the sand,
the searing joy of wave on wave
scouring, embracing us, foam splash
like fragments of bright glass, the water a hot oil
dissolving us to weightless wobbly
things -- our feet reaching for the ribs of sand,
toe tips just barely finding them, cooler water
feeling around our levitated ankles – and then
retreat into the shallows, where our legs
came back in lumbering deliberate weight we carried

half way to the beach, quite self-important,
return of the Argonauts or something,
the sand so soft, dissolving in between our toes,
the water foaming, eddying around us
in soft chains dispersing between our wavering
thoughtful arms, and then we swept more water at each
other?

And yet an image is a fixed thing, floating
in the darkness of the mind, the marker
of invisible movement, like highway signs
that blare up toward your megaphone of light
as you shout ahead into the darkness
of the streaming night, still for that moment
in the river sucking past your skin of folded metal,
your slowly leaking boat shaken by dim
vibratory portents, as you surge ahead and back
into the future of the past, imperfect knowledge
beckoning in little candied lights,
the sugary-glossy green and yellow green,
the funnel of enigmas chinked with shards
of mica, the beckoning firestones. How weightless,
motionless the sign is in that pressurized
moment, as you fall into the hourglass of night,
eaten by the grains of sand-light spewing up
through the vanishing point somewhere
at the center of the windshield.
There is a hidden story, after all,
but who can penetrate its surfaces?
Memory requires many voices to defeat its images.
The powers of the false. Times when a glance
combines so strangely with another's
and the two are both affected
by the presence of a third, disinterested observers
watching both of you, the things around irrelevant
yet still the truth somehow – two people
encountering each other for the first time

in a while, quite unexpectedly,
the very intimacy of their encounter,
and its publicness, and yet surely
neither would have chosen it this way –
at this particular spot, this place, this time –
and so the clearly accidental
could only have the tension that it does
were it not the external cover and mute witness
of a past and deeper intimacy. How clear it all must be
to that third party. Yet it isn't to the two involved,
who must be strangers to each other, surely.
Yes, they were only pretending to be the faces
that their names had masked, it was
another time, another elsewhere, there
where the moon touched down a blood-stained print
just inside the window -- that was where
they each thought to have known the other from.
It really wasn't earthlight that they peered
into each other's faces by, but rather the appointment
of dark matter with this other side,
the here that we assume is simply here
being in reality – although that's not the word –
a shadow realm where voices cross and gather,
fade and then come ringing back
quite inexplicably. How can you gather in the rain
that falls just past your window? These are
the numbered days, the mortgaged time.
**GO OFF WITH NOTHING TOUCHING YOU
EXCEPT THE WIND** carrying firewood
to the market in the morning, bringing wine back at dusk.
Where can my home be? Only there
in the green woods through the clouds.
There where the field's path breaks off
amid the surge of brown, dry grass,
where wind is raking at the ember dust of summer
in the roadside fields – hacked stubble of the corn

quite dim and gray, the burnt alfalfa – and the
moon just come,
dust pale fingerprint in the hyacinth blue sky –
there in the counted hour quite set apart
I have walked alone, considering
the few last things that hold me to the summer's hearth.
When they are done I'll have to slip away,
dusk clad traveler who arrived at dusk,
sitting by the fire a brief spoken time,
drawing a few figures in the ember tray
then leaving early, very early in the morning,
well before anyone had known him gone.

II

Don't you remember when we lay in bed that night? –
the rain was sweeping down the skylight
and the trees outside were throwing off their clothes of
leaves,
embracing the furious passion of the storm
which washed the lights in waves – starlight
and streetlights and perhaps the moon –
small bleeds of gold and indigo. You lay there smoking,
watching, listening; I ran my hands along your spine,
the small white bumps like pebbles from the bottom of a
stream.

Each time you breathed I felt a kind of word,
not one you spoke or even one you thought,
a word that wasn't yet, you breathed in
and breathed out again; my fingers listened to the spoken
text,
the dark and streaming gold or midnight blue,
the silver threads of dream and wanting,
the undertow of fear, dim striving of presentiment
to be the thing it hopes, to be the thing it fears,
fear in itself a kind of hope. Warm and then cool your back,
so smooth, and like the white shaft of a candle,
the flame inside your breath, the wick your spine.
I almost touched your life then, I felt this very clearly,
feeling the tremors of inhaling, exhaling,
breathing more traumatic than we think it is.
My pity for your life, my life, our lives –
that was what I felt then, only that,
over and over, as the rain washed down the glass.
You talked about your work, I listened.
Do you remember anything, and did you tell the truth?
What was the word I listened for, felt,
as though within the stream bed of your life,

sifting and sifting through the sands for it?
The rain that fell and surged, the wind
a kind of current and yet not a current,
the wind a harsh and shouting throng,
the clamorous assembly of the lost,
the grieving, the searing possibility of now,
the thing they gather to denounce;
the terrible injustice of the then,
intolerable miscarriage they denounce still more.
And now and now – what did I hear? What did I feel?
Don't you remember all the shapes of smoke
you blew into the bedside light? They
floated, drifted, turning like a scarf around
the throat of light that rose into the lamp,
the metal shade a kind of helmet, soldier of light,
soldier of fortune, for fortune is in light, light
streaming chance, in minute particles,
for chance is very small, a tiny tiny thing.
Come to me now my precious, and my new-found love,
my love that chance has brought me
from there somewhere beyond the blue
where all our chances come from, yes,
far beyond the blue, the endpoint of the world.
O for the depths of grief the city builds,
raising in absolutely straight lines sheerest blindness
in the dazzling chemicals of light; shimmering indifference
of the bank facades, the endless steel of roads.
Come to me now my truly and my falsely loved,
my precious and my undeserved,
there is no happiness apart from you,
there is no light, no warmth, no hope, no joy,
you whom I glimpsed that morning on the traffic's bank,
you whom I never knew, waiting there in line,
you the very image, moving within yourself,
your time quite different from my own, enveloping
your own quite separate and unfathomable life,

you whom I saw so often offering yourself
to light and air and wind, the horizon of the city
took you, and you vanished in the purple dusk.
Smoke of winter evening, and my solitude
is filled with grief, and yet so suddenly you're there,
becoming the very image of desire, leaving it.
You rose and put a robe on, your black silk robe.
How wonderful your skin was, yet silk made it more so
still,
how maddening my desire for you.
Yes, the absolute torment of your beauty
became a thing of touch, to touch again and yet again.
Yet I could never find the image of your softness,
understand it, master it, defeat it -- moth wings, rose petals
or the boa's underside, what was the truth of your body?
Did I ever feel it? know it? And what did you desire?
My fingers trailing on your nipples
when your bra had slipped askew, your gold hair
like an autumn leaf between your legs,
your silken wetness, then the tip of my very tip,
the underside with its threadlike cord,
the remnant of a wound, my heart laid bare,
you spread eagle in the darkness as the fire
poured out its heat. Our skin was still a cover
for the fire, and so we tore it off, tore it away
from what we really were -- yes, it was we
who were the tinder piled in the metal grate,
we the rising figures in the flames,
we the blackened flue, the twisted iron, the heavy heavy
stone.

So it seems now, a mere thing of the past,
or so at least to one of them, perhaps to both;
and it's really not a question of clarity.
They know already what is happening,
the reality of that moment, and of the previous things,
the past that it's all based on, that it briefly, very briefly

calls back into present time again.
Yet do we have a memory, either short or long?
Is this not a mere lacuna, a feebleness, a vagueness,
in our phenomenological descriptions?
A primitive concept, after all, a kind of tablet,
bank or record, a trace, a mark –
all sorts of terms from hunting, commerce,
or pedagogical convenience.
I don't think it exists. There is no
memory, there is no written script,
there is no light that glows from
somewhere deep below the blue
of the reactor waters, haunting them,
wavering, still, light-scrawled, peaceful, terrible.
There is no memory; the sidewalk
has its lichen rings of salt, its eczema
of chalky winter dust, the calcium chloride
that they use to melt the ice.
There is no ice to melt, though, there is
no other deep inside the corridor:
I am the wind that blows through,
I feel it blowing through it even now,
my lungs are empty hanging husks,
tattered corn remnants, the husks of sleep
and dream, the kernels of past time,
I feel them inside the marrow of my bones.
I hide my face among the shadows
of my leaves, pillowed on straw
I'm swept out of the barn at morning,
And yet my stride takes in the golden fields
striped with the sunset's burnt and hectic red.
Deep in the night the secret fires are lit.
The grit of sunlight in my woven lashes
keeps me from knowing all they have in store.
Yet I shall still come back, and always will,
hidden in the dusty spots of the light,

the vortex dust, the helix of moted rays.
And what they don't know, what they still deny
to present experience, not wishing to revisit it,
relive it, is nonetheless still known to both,
and how so very clearly, too, to both of them.
What this is, how clear they are to each other,
the mutual comprehension of what after all is,
are two separate pasts diverging from
a further past, an inner divergence,
an incompatibility between two files,
two projects of hope and memory –
is this not what a person is after all,
hope and memory diverging backward
and forward from the elusive present
always somehow displaced, though by itself
in the guise of its own successor,
and yet this too displaced, displacing itself
both forward to the future, backward to the past,
so that time is not of a person – what is a
person after all? –

and nature does not really know of time, is a series
of concentric circles on a surface of perhaps
interlocking spheres – transparent, luminous, multiplying
from each other in chain upon chain, brief episodes
dissolving light amid darkness – it too is part of light;
death is not sleep, we know this inwardly, deeply,
and yet continue to deceive ourselves.
There really is no death then in that sense, it is not
an event in life but bounds the shimmering circles,
they push it back, never touching it and yet
it is always there, the two pasts, the intertwining,
could not continue that way, an inner divergence separating
them,
as though in principle even at this source,
and they know this very clearly. We usually think
of understanding as being a thing of words,

but here, now, there are no words needed
for them to know what each other knows
and also what each other does not know,
both the clarity and the limits, the darkness,
obscurity of each other's understanding
and self-understanding, being clear to both of them
and to both instantly and mutually, as though
they shared, for that brief moment, a single mind,
perhaps more so now than ever they had done
in their relationship – all this so clearly an affair of looks,
of glances, and so perhaps, confusedly, of images,
strings, chains of images, chains and spheres of images,
worlds of images as we might think of them, time-realms,
pasts. Yet memory requires many voices,
in order to defeat its multiplying images,
for memory is not inaccurate, it is not a question of
accuracy;
it is productive, a power of life in its own right.
Our life moves outward in all directions, dimensions,
like a sphere, yet memory requires many voices
So there was always this weird thing about him see
it was like no I don't want to yes you will
no I will not you have to look I really really really
need to have that give it back I don't care what you say
he's not staying and if I ever catch you here again
well then all right my pretty So the whole problem
with the night is this – I sit here in the dark,
the day is like the actual life of time, and night
is time slowed down or gathered together in a single place,
a well or something in the pocket of a coat,
the plumb lines of the forest dropping straight
into the throat of darkness, like an unlit cellar
And how in that moment when two people
first see each other in quite a while, how,
in that moment so many things are instantly clear to both of
them,

how must it be for blind people, do they
 evolve a different society, different social patterns
 which don't depend so much on surprise meetings?
 How is it that our thoughts are visible in our faces?
 How is it that our memories are also visible there,
 for past experience, past worlds kept living
 yet without physical substance, somehow, in memory?
 And memory which is an image in the mind
 is also somehow visible in our face to others
 but only to certain others, those who also share it.
 Yet this mutual comprehension is altered
 by the presence of a third person, an observer
 whose gaze envelops and includes that of the other two.
 So the seven foldings, interleavings of the night,
 the day, the gathering and changing spaces
 that you move among, are always shed from you
 and gathered also as you pass from daylight
 into darkness back to daylight once again,
 the cycle of the others, not your own.
 You would have taken a quite different route,
 subterranean fulfillments, as we might think of them.
 Back alley darkness fed you like a tick with blood.
 Your shadow then distended like an artery tied off
 gave you that crooked figure like a mandrake root,
 fluent cipher of darkness, marking no time for anyone,
 fluent cipher of darkness, like a dribble of mad ink,
disappearing
 in the cracks of the clock's face, not realizing
 those were just its hands pointing either to itself
 or else to space in general, but they were
 black leaves rolled into pointed gothic shadows,
 the slowly shifting fault lines
 in the desert face of day, breaking out
 like spider-webbed leaf veins of sandy thirst
 woven around the statues of our second thoughts;
 below the lily pad, the archipelago

of slowly dispersing moments, widening more and more,
are yet the more definitive disruptions,
crevices and drain holes like at the bottom of a pool,
there in the deepest part beneath threatening blue water
oiled with wobbling light here in the gemmed darkness
of the expensive patio. No one is around,
fluent cipher of darkness, never marking time
but swallowing it whole, drink up the swimming pool,
swallow each wave of night before the owners
take the whole thing back, take it inside yourself.
Vomit it all up through every pore,
even through your eyes, and yet you're always doing this
each moment of every day. And yet
you are my image of a freedom won not lost.
You are the sole inhabitant now possible
of all my unrecoverable dreams just barely still accessible
perhaps
in some minimal, some charred and shrunken form.
And yet the charred, the burnt, the ruined
are what I most desire now and feed upon,
and yet not ruined, reduced to an essential stringency,
an absolute anarchic desperation, sane,
considered, sober, and yet fearlessly erotic.
Now do we even dare to write those words,
we who have seen the world turned inside out.
These are my only musings now,
the mission of my fate, the few last sprigs of mint,
the sage, the clutches of dried grass,
these are the things I place into the fire.
These are the things I burn with that I am given now
in the new torrential streaming of bright autumn,
in the sudden showering down of what was lost.
The screaming horizon calling me once again
(Yet surely it must be the first time still)
to greater violation, greater confidence.
Burn with a colder and yet invisible fury,

it seems to say, hide it always and yet nurture it.
Spirit of violation, spirit of secrecy –
sincerity, passion, secrecy – these the three virtues
of all my race, these and the love of shapeliness.
Gather your loneliness, anarchic solitude
and spirit of self-creation, sovereign and tormenting.
But you, lithe spirit of darkness,
no, you would have chosen other things,
a different rhythm, certainly, different colors too perhaps.
What are the colors that you deal in most, though?
Crimson certainly, blue more seldom than one might have
thought,

green and green of green, the most mysterious,
the unaccountable, unless it be the white of black,
or else, conversely (yes) the black of white.
These are all visible around you like a sheath,
but most importantly within that strange horizon,
the iris of your eye – those wonderful fringed greens
each like a tiny slice of kiwi fruit, so bright
and flashing in the dark. Yes, seven sheaths you carry
in your dark electric fur, lithe shadows of your body,
and yet two more lives are given to you too.
O how I envy you, my little anima, my black
street haunting, light evading, silent and lithely
fluid one, possessing your own destiny in a way
no mortal does, regent of darkness and embodiment
of secrecy, silent power, absence of memory,
immediate intelligence, and untraceable murder.
And what if it were possible to kill
not by any normal means but in a stealthy
shifting and subliminal fashion, adjusting the victim
with precise and graduated steps, measuring them,
assessing, watching, then recruiting them
to one's own purposes. Yes,
what if it were possible to kill this way?
What would the victims look like do you think?

III

And so the one thing that we always know
is that we never know. Deep in the shifting counterpane
of time, there where you've hidden
with your head tucked underneath the crumpled
folded hills, the little landscape patches –
mint green, and deepest hunter green,
a sensuous burnt orange, a cool teal blue,
then mystic indigo, and absorbing calming brown and
black.

Wind yourself deeper in, making a conch shell
of the snowy sheets you've twisted around
yourself: you hear the fabric rustle of the surf,
even as you stare into the dark between your hands.
In the depths of the sea the octopus is sleeping too,
in the cave where in the darkness its
bio-luminescent skin shimmers with flushed
and hectic colors – crimsons and orchid
and papaya orange – it cools to aqua and a parrot green
streaked with soft yellow, flaring suddenly
with a network of electric pink, then instantly
softening, cooling like a coal beneath its dust.
It brightens and darkens simultaneously,
steadily pulsing like a human heart,
yet circulating colors as it does –
a kind of breathing of color, as of water,
there in the depths. And yet the octopus
is thinking of you, because it has to be; and you,
although you may not know it, think of it.
For in so far as thinking is affected by the eye,
you have that much in common, you and it:
modern biologists can see no difference in
the eye of a human and that of an octopus,
they seem to be the same, identical. You see

with an octopus' eye, it sees with yours;
 some part of you must think as it does, then,
 must feel as it does, some part of it must think
 and feel as you do, as you would do, as you do in fact,
 as you fall into your strangest sleep. So then
 it was like I said the fuck out of here no you look you fuck
 yeah that's right yeah then there was this other guy
 and he was like this guy is like fucking old
 he's like forty or something and so it's like ok Lilly fine
 you're fucking him you're not fucking him
 I do not care ok hi what's up not much
 so what do you think what would you do
 to me tie you up and then what tease you tease me
 yeah how you'll see take what you feel
 and change it around change it how you'll see
 Circumcision isn't really so bad, you know,
 I think what's her name says this somewhere
 in one of her books. It's actually kind of fun.
 And it is known to have numerous health benefits.
 Now there arose up a new king to reign over Egypt
 For a long time we had been running through the forest,
 the wind – it was summer – was so warm
 and fragrant. The darkness in the woods.
 They were so dark and so confusing....
 You wanted to lie down, give up. So tired. So tired.
 Hungry. Thirsty. Tired and worse than tired.
 And so there was hail, and fire mingled with hail
 Some had tried to hide in barns or cellars or in attics,
 but they'd been quickly found and taken out and shot.
 How much blood does a human body have?
 It ran in the streets and in the squares, it ran like rain in the
 gutters.
 And when it was morning the east wind brought the
 locusts,
 and the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt

And as we ran all I could see were dark branches lashing
my face,

as we ran, yet trying always to be silent...

And I remembered watching through the blinds

as they tortured the old man in the square.

I remember a cigarette lighter. A knife. Piano wire.

How much blood does a human body have?

How he screamed and screamed, and then was silent.

For the locusts covered the face of the whole earth,

so that the land was darkened. And then

when they had caught us all they said,

Which of you will tell us where the others are?

Whoever does, we'll let him live. But the Lord

led the people out through the way of the wilderness

through the Red Sea, so that the land was darkened.

We rose and left the fire where it was

and went out through the back door.

The frame was still there though the door itself

was gone – dirt floor and deep shadows,

bales of hay and hanging gear, the horses were asleep,

walked down the narrow path between the stalls

and in the moonlight the hay looked strange.

There was a hole in the barn roof

that you could see right up through.

Stars of the cool October sky, she raised her shirt,

the heavy flannel work shirt that she wore

to show me where the horse had nipped her

on her back, I pretended I could see

and kissed her there; she gave a little shiver

and smiled back at me, and we went out through the door

and toward the apple orchard. We walked among the apple
trees.

Windfalls were on the ground, the sweet cold scent,

the frost was in the air; the night would be very cold.

Earlier by the bonfire she had looked at me through the
flames.

That was when I knew she was a witch, that was
when I knew that she had done something to my mind.
The fire became strange colors, and there were faces
in the colors, sounds came from them – from their eyes
which opened wider wider, stretched to become mouths
and the mouths were crying out. The fire was crying
with its rush of voices, like when cattle or horses are
frightened
or like when they slaughter pigs. Then, as we walked on
through the orchard's trees, she slipped her hand into mine.
My body tingled and began to stir. She brushed against me.
Then she made me stop. My heart was pounding,
and her mouth was open and very soft and full,
wider it opened like the faces in the fire
and then her face was like that –stretching wider
like a smoke ring, and it swallowed me,
I fell into the opening in her face. I knew
I was on the ground. I felt the grass, and then
it wasn't grass, it was her body under me.
More spaces opened, fields and warm melting snow,
I was the dream the snow dreamed as it melted,
mine was the hand it dreamed whose fingers scored
insignia of time and darkness into it as the many faces that
it also held
called out beneath us, crystalline voices of the earth,
light of the fallen realms – journeying, transformed –
arms that were wrapped around me became
branches gathering the wind I was,
rising within me were smaller branches still.
I was their leaves and then the children crying through the
falling flakes,
gold and yellow, burning them in piles in the amber light,
dissolving in the forest pools of moss and loam,
these were the leaves and yet we tread them down
in piles and piles, swimming through them,
raising ourselves higher, falling back

as though through waterfalls – the whirl-pooled light,
the apples dropping with soft knocks on the door of the
orchard grass

let us in mother legs around me and the dark opening
what would this lead to I was wondering fearing
what could it lead to? yet I did not stop
Eyes through darkness calling me
mouths that were like wounds ears that were hearing us
an eating away of history from within
sexual desire is evil then I knew, it is the source of
falsehood

Walking back toward the fires afterward
her moving somewhat ahead of me then off to one side a bit
stars were so numerous, some falling through wicker
treetops

as we moved through the last arcade, the fires up ahead
I moved off to the left and she the opposite way
joining her people somewhere in the dark
camped out along the slope, moving shapes past the fire's
hollow

If I could change the color of the sky I'd do so in your case.
I'd alter the blue or cloudy covering which conceals your
past,

the thing which after all I am most curious about,
the flow of clouds across the moonlit space,
so pure and cold and beautiful, even this, too,
is an emblem of the change I'd somehow keep from you,
somehow forestall. The total movement of the sky
as cloud formations shift – this is a thing which more than
any other

I associate with you. It was not always so.
No, it was rather that the wind-blown through the leaves
creating right in front of us the image of the possible
and likely loss of all the kingdoms of the earth,
made to be given up, presented to another,
was, after all, all that I could deal with.

The sky was flowing with the dark and constant wind,
pond mantle clouds were moving with a steady pace
onward toward the nameless and the imageless
(if they reach it what will happen?)
the threshold is the span of time itself
the moment too of space when images become reality,
reality dissolved in flowing images, the feel of movement
all around us sneaking all around the whole,
an engagement dark and yet bluey bright,
secrecy everywhere you know this then,
secrecy without secrets, and yet everywhere.
Bright precision of cloud tatters, depth of the coming

storm,

infinity of moments cast away then used once more,
and for all that an absence of fatigue.
Do you remember how that really is?

O how deep the cobalt blue – peripheral shards of

moonlight

and the clouds are flowing nonetheless, moving on
into the blue green depths of time where it
begins to border space, of space where it
secretes the ringing, the gathering, the animating
shout of time, scarf of white radiant cloud,
deep gloam of red silt dusk,
pumice stone of low clouds, the hills' fireplace ash.

The wings of the fire that burst forth beating up
after the logs have caught, the up-draft, the ascending
braids of gold and white sparks twisting in a
helix ascending as we stand amid the wake of heat,
shiver of warmth around us then as the light beats all its

wings –

I walked into the fire and then called to you
See it's all quite harmless, come, I said.
I motioned you to enter, extending both my hands.
You entered and we moved and shone within
each other, separating from ourselves, becoming

four, then eight, sixteen, uncountable: radiant sound was
light,

light and light echoing, petals of flame fell round us
and we rose into the anther light bulb filament,
the blue reflection of our other times
floated in depthless glass, globes of transparent flame
in which a doorway opening showed us condensed
into an opal magma with beads of tear-like candle wax
running down myriad faces of a blue angelic host
rising and waiting there, embracing us:
Why have you been so long? they said.
The candle wick burnt down low
to an open, ragged, gaping fish mouth of char,
to the wet black orchid of a wound.
So it will never be too late to end the icicle chain
of dental like fragments, the smoky face of the mummified

--

Ibis mummy in fragments threads torn loose
from the cloth of what is predestined
unknown, linceuil of gravid dreams humanity,
lived and not lived, disanimato she whispered
in the darkness of the room the shadow moving closer to
the door

Ibis mummy where the river broke through the dark
The trees in her hair, the sun-flowing light spreading
the gold chains in the draft of the lake,
her eyes open again her eyes again closed
Bushels of apples arms full of wheat
the green branches of pine and its spread cones
thrown down at her footsteps by the wind
The panther is loose in the dark waters
the panther has entered the night the stars
trees filling with voices the crystals of fire
These are drawn in the pomegranate seeds the jaguar
has come down through the smoke, the jaguar
It is the dark of the wavering moon with leaves

trembling on the river's mane where the river bathes in the
light

The jaguar has stepped through the walls of the room
its eyes are two candles the wind comes
and the candles are snuffed, its body is as silent as smoke
The tiger of the night the river is striped with the moon
the leopard bathes in the green pool the panther comes
down

Bats now and the owl's watching, the moon waits high
The river opens and the night flows into it
the sun is buried deep under its eye, the moon
shines in its mane where the wind combs it backward
In the still shallows the light is like spider webs
the spider leg shadows step out onto the night
The peacocks flow around us now their blue heads radiant
The ibis the bird of resurrection walks out of the closet
door

The tree cries and cries The pipe line is buried in the
beating heart

The glass of the moon-flow is cracking with light
and the trees lace their shadows together, the earth leaks
away

Doors of the floating house open to the scorpion rooms

The stairway is full of oranges apples and grapes piled high
on every step

The December grooms the January brides
come out of their hiding spots, yet two had been hanging
upside down

in the attic from hooks two from the cellar rafters
like bunches of onions like parsley left to dry
Her breast is a clock however, the eels are eating her leg
Disanimato, she whispered Her brother, his face of dried
clay

turns in the room's half-light, the candle light

haloes his eyelids, the harpsichord music sounds far and
slow and fine
in the ancient rooms there where
my condom had burst and the ants crawled forth
there where her condom had burst and the scorpion
came out
The dead carp lay in the bucket covered with gravel
and sand
we threw it back in the river and then the river itself
was sand
Green sand flowed away through the concrete abutments
the iodine light turned to absolute black The river was
ashen
was scorpions rushing beneath me was roaches whispering
Some whores from downtown were coming through the
alley just then
One of them gave me a blow job down by the river bank
Her head was a construction of papier mache, as it bobbed
on its hinge
I severed it with my knife and then lifted it up to the gray
and crimson sky
and drank from her arteries deeply and full
the orgasm still going on and on, hers not mine
Insect knowledge flowed into me then, I knew
Insect knowledge was mine So it will never be too
late to end
the smoke lace from your last cigarette
the deep hole of whispering knowledge
where the room has sunk in its bubble of lamp light
So it will never be too late to drink the sea down to its
ultimate root
there in the library where the trees have grown back
the radio station way way after hours when the cool dj's
whispering low and vaguely obscene into the end of days
And it's really too bad we've got so many white males

but what else can you do We could cut them up
 and use them for scrap I suppose Images of the
 Fall of Saigon
 the man dangling from the helicopter runners the man
 punched in the face trying to claw his way onto a cargo
 plane
 Liberation of Saigon how well I remember the Saigon
 women
 the wide tree-lined boulevards black wrought iron of the
 old hotels
 French doors with tiny balconies stone urns along the
 sidewalks
 the markets selling fruit the fragmentation grenade one day
 the men with no legs on wheeled boards the women
 small and shapely almost doll-like she who would
 come to me
 in the blue green night her silhouette by the curtained doors
 in the brandy colored dimness She said she was going to
 poison me
 one day then she'd giggle and then get very serious and still
 The blue fragment of moon dropped through the slot of the
 window
 pried its eye through the sharp slit of blind
 It will never be too late to end the destruction
 of one region of the world by another
 I rode out to the desert the hills were black paper cut out
 on a cyanic sky
 The lightened sand was opening its page
 one more in the oldest of books. Never ending.
 Still I rode on.

IV

Is the otherness of the light an otherness in truth
or is the light as intimate as darkness is?
For darkness is within – the fibers and the fabric,
the woven cloth, the body and its passages,
there where no light can go, the obverse of the light.
All body is of darkness then, remote from day,
the bright external splendor, the pure medium
which yet is more than medium, but is
the thing conveyed as well, surpassing
any given thing conveyed, and infinitely.
And if the light is other, radically,
then does it leave a trace within me
when I see it, or see by it, does it impose its own
peculiar trauma as part of my own seeing,
as part of every seeing and of every sight,
intimate with it and even one with it?
Where does the light withdraw to
when I close my eyes? Where does my thought
withdraw to, likewise, when I sleep?
Is there a spring of darkness both are from,
both light and thought? Light, space growing
slightly brown
as in an old daguerreotype, old haunted photographs,
a certain dimness opens and renders the light itself
more active, more qualified and charged.
The sound of the trees, the leaves, the wind is picking up.

One knows the river is still flowing. She and her women,
they were beside the river, nowhere possible for them to go,
nowhere possible for them to stay; then he came in the
cold night,
with several men. And she was willing for him,
and more than willing; her women, though, were not,

and so she ordered them to go with the men. Even so,
the youngest still would not, and so two of them
dragged her off.

Yet before they did she gave her a philter

THIS TO PASS: PLACE NAMES

IRAQ/LIBYA/FALKLANDS/CAMBODIA

HANOI/HIROSHIMA THE GATES OF HORN

At first there were sirens. Then other sounds,

strange sounds.

I didn't know what they were. So loud. I never heard

anything so loud.

Buildings on fire. The streets full of burning gasoline.

So of course sometimes I think, How did I get into this?

I mean, I know perfectly well. Being pregnant is, well...

it is what it is. It isn't that, it's more...like...

my entire *life*? Stepping back from it, I wonder

what would I be if I were a man? Of course, If I were a man

I wouldn't be me. But maybe I would, maybe you

could say

there's something that's really *you* down underneath

everything else, even your sex, your gender,

your whatever

At any rate, I do see myself as a man sometimes.

Well, what I mean is I wonder what it must be like

to have a man's body. Not *that* aspect. I actually think

there's really not so much difference as far as that goes

But what I mean about having a man's body,

it's more his height, or his arms. God, even the nerdiest

little zero of guy can -- well, I was checking into

a hotel one time.

I had this *huge* suitcase, actually several, so I – and I

was beat,

I was totally exhausted, and this – he was actually

rather sweet,

was behind me in line, the place was *packed* – it was

a convention,

and he said, "Here, let me." And that was one thing right there – that rather commanding quality, that *presence*: Here, let me. Women have a hard time getting that. Men just *have it*. It's really, I don't know, now sometimes it's obnoxious of course, but other times you have to admire it. So at any rate, this guy just picks this thing up for me, and I said he didn't have to, but he just did it anyway, and we get into the elevator, and he's still carrying it, and I'm – I have to admit part of me is saying "hey wait" and part is just kind of gliding along with the whole arrangement. There was a kind of smoothness to the whole ...*moment*? Were we having a moment? Anyway, this bag had been practically breaking my arm, and yet it's absolutely nothing to him. And then I got off at my floor, and he still wants to help me with it *to my room*. And I'm thinking, oh Christ, HOW STUPID could I be, I've got some psycho here. And so I'm trying to think of a polite way of saying no thanks, "oh no thank you," "that's ok," in other words, "get lost, please," "bye," "see ya." But then as it turns out my room was – naturally – right near the elevator, which you might know, any other time you'd have to go around in a virtual maze. And so THEN, he just left the thing in front of the door. And smiled. And left. And that was it. Well of course I was relieved. He actually wasn't that bad looking – kind of short and wiry, probably Jewish or Sicilian or something. He might have at least shown *some* interest. Well, anyway.... A man in a robe of flame, walking slow like in a storm,

his arms moving like he was swimming
Phosphorous, eerie white halo. Flesh chars and
 flakes away
like burnt newspaper. A scream that was not a
 human scream.
That was my child's death. And then I also died.
The skin peeling away from my chest, both breasts gone.
Bare bone of ribs visible. I died. I am a ghost. I am only
 a word here.

And yet these things that I tell you are true. **SORROW**
These things that I say are true. **ANGER**
I am the child who did not live. I am the ghost
of the woman I would have been.
I am dead now. I am a word here. And yet what I
 say is true.

There are an infinite number of children inside each of us.
Every human being is haunted. Melancholy with her
 paraphernalia:
A clock, a globe, and an egg are placed at points nearby.
Objects cast long shadows, as in de Chirico. Melancholy.
She's in a cage of light and dark, the bars curved like
 space-time.

The cage of space-time. I am the spirit of melancholy.
Perhaps I was once an angel. But here I am the figure of
 Melancholy
which is called Woman. I am the spirit called Melancholy.
This is what I am, this these chains which are my arms
these chains which are my legs, these chains
which are my thoughts. The entire world
 fits onto my globe.

The sand pours down. The world is the sand in my
 hour glass
and the sand pours down. In the sand are the faces
of sorrowing mothers and the sand pours down.
Winter morning, so easily the milk flows out,
I look in the mirror, so little sleep. Will I ever sleep again?

Will I ever wake? So easily the milk flows out,
 and my hair is disheveled, I look into the mirror
 That's not me. Yes it is. The winter morning, and the snow
 flakes down from the sky. I wait for my child, for my son.
 For my daughter.
 Now is the time when I become someone else. I am
 already another.
 I come to the undefined spaces of the earth, to
 no-man's-land.
 I look here. I look there. Where am I? What am I?
 O it's not possible to say what I am. I am a spirit.
 But now I am buried deep in the earth. You must dig
 and dig to find me,
 I must dig and dig upward to make myself known.
 I'm on a beach. This is a beach, and that is the sea.
 The sea is the Mediterranean, and the sky is so blue.
 The white sand,
 the blue water, the sun so bright and hot. The sand dazzles
 with sun-glare.
 Blindness from so much light. There are people
 watching me.
 I come out into the square. All eyes are upon me.
 In the public square the midday light throbs. All eyes
 see only me.

No no no no no, no no no no no
 in-breath, out-breath, step forward, step backward,
 forward backward
 Let's turn off the lights. oh damn goddamn that rope.
 Where'd you get it anyway?
 Hey, the material it feels weird, like...skin.
 Watch what you're doing. You're on my foot.
 This material feels so...it's like...It's like skin
 Very smooth skin. I feel it all in the dark. The man's skin,
 so smooth for a man. A child's skin. Where is she?
 And then I thought, my god I have blood on my hands,

my children's blood. I thought, *I'm insane*,
I thought, *Time has stopped*. The world is charcoal.
**THERE OVER THERE WHERE THERE SEE NO
IN THE DARK THERE IN THE DARK DO YOU SEE
I HEAR HER NOW VERY SOFT HEAR YES HEAR
YES**

The light is so hard; I don't want to see it.
The world is ashes.
I can't take it. The sky is so blue. I'll hang myself.
The chafe of the rope around my neck, that's what I
want now.
I thought then, I've been dead for so long. When will
I wake?
Is this the rest of my life? My face is the sun, a black sun.
A rope.

I don't need it. I'm Medea **STOP** I'm a queen **STOP**
**SHE STANDS UP. SHE ENTERS TOWARD THE
OTHERS AS MEDEA.**
I'm in love with the underworld. Dark waters are rising
to greet me.
**CHILDLESS NOW I REIGN IN THE DARKNESS,
HUSBANDLESS NOW I REIGN IN THE DARKNESS,
ALONE NOW I REIGN IN THE DARKNESS**
Where is my husband? where is Jason? With his new bride
I was his bride. No longer. There's a message.
Bring me the mirror. This is not Medea.
Will you read the message Lady? Read it for me nurse.
What does it say?
Leave our country on pain of death. How can this be?
**JASON. PROJECTION: NIGHT SKY-LINE OF
MAJOR CITIES**

Jason. Woman why do you weep? What should I do?
I have arranged for you to be sheltered here seven days,
both you and your children.
This is not shelter. Outside there is only the sea.
Across the sea is my home. How can I get there?

You have seven days. Jason why do you not love me?
A voice of sorrow is not pleasing.
Do you not remember? My body was once your desire.
My body was once your ladder. Rung by rung you
climbed up.
Now you kick me away. That was before.
Yes, and who is she? Nothing is gained in this way.
Seven days.

**JASON EXITS FROM MEDEA AND ENTERS
TOWARD CREON.**

You have spoken with this woman?
I have explained. She appreciates your generosity.
Well she should. Seven days is a long time to shelter
an alien woman of doubtful character, about whom there
are strange rumors,
and her children as well, all of them burdens upon our
treasury.
Your affairs are going well? They go very well. I have high
prospects.
Our daughter is most happy. Lady, why this crying?
What will become of Medea? What will become of her
children?

MEDEA ENTERS TOWARD CREON.

Creon, you must give me asylum.
Seven days. And after that? What will I do?

We have other concerns. As it is we are being generous
I am a reasonable man, and patient, but there are limits
to everything. We cannot tolerate foreigners in our realm,
especially those skilled in the arts of witchcraft.

Not that I give credence to such nonsense. I pride myself on my rationality. But you should take this as a warning: We have reason to suspect you of subversion against our state.

What is your witchcraft, really? It is some kind of spying, primitive perhaps by our standards, but spying nonetheless. Be advised woman, it was only at the pleading of your former husband that I did not have you and your children thrown into the sea with stones around your necks. Be advised. Quit our shores in seven days, or that is what awaits you.

**THE NIGHT. HER MOUTH WHISPERING.
HER PERFUME.HER SOUNDS IN THE DARK
ROOM.**

I was thinking in the dark where am **I IN THE
DARKNESS** where is this place **IN THE SILENCE**
and the snow falling outside **ON AND ON AND ON**
**[A SMALL TABLE WITH BOTTLES OF WHISKEY,
PILLS, A VANITYAND SMALL DOLLS AND
CANDLES.**

**MEDEA DRINKING AND TAKING PILLS.
SHE BEGINS PLAYING WITH THE DOLLS.
A BROKEN-DOWN STARLET IN THE OLD
HOLLYWOOD TRADITION]**

My children...I've seen you before. You're not real.
I'm Medea. I'm the Wicked Witch of the West.
I know you. I know you. I know who you are.
But I never really knew what I wanted, what I was doing.
It wasn't really...me – sounds so stupid.
I'm so messed up. You know it was just this thing, some
women, they like it, they get into it, they can do all this
mother stuff.

It doesn't bother them, I guess. I must be so drunk.
O Jason....

I must be so, so drunk. And I really didn't think I would.

It was there in the fridge, the bottle. But I was going to pour it down the sink. I was. I really really was. I mean I was absolutely. STOP ME I had absolutely no intention of drinking it. I didn't even want to, but every time I thought of pouring it out I thought "yeah, sure. Fine. I will, but not just right now."

I'd just gotten up, you know, so – fine, ok, and then a little while later I thought STOP ME Yes well it was when I first met him, and I was so messed up. Xanax. Valium. The doctor wouldn't give me anymore. Halcyon.

The bird of chemical paradise spread its wings above me. The sunset was blood crimson streaming around the entire earth.

The stars were like the sparks from a coal when you blow on it.

The earth was a coal going white. And it was winter, and I waited for him.

I couldn't help it. And the male arrogance was just like dripping off him, and I loved him, I hated him, I wanted him over and over. I couldn't help it.

I must be so loaded...I don't even remember really, but the idea must have been there. I didn't know it was. I really didn't. It wasn't like –"yeah I'm thinking of that, I know that I am, it's in the back of my mind," or, you know, maybe not even that, in the corner of my mind or somewhere. It wasn't even that. It was just invisible. It was an absolutely invisible presence in my mind, like the way they say radiation is – you can't see it, smell it, taste it, nothing, but it's there. And so you know I don't have a mind really to be out of. I have different minds. They come and go like weather. They're just floating around inside you. You can't get a fix on them. That's the whole problem

really. Stop me.

HER BODY SEETHED WITH HEAT. MADDENED BY THE FIRE THAT POSSESSED HER, SHE ROLLED IN THE BLACK DUST OF THE COAL CELLAR, SOAKED HERSELF IN A VAT OF ICE, HUNG HERSELF FROM A HOOK N THE MEAT COOLER. SHE TORE THE CLOTHES FROM HER BODY AND RAN THROUGH THE STREETS NAKED. SHE STUFFED FLIES AND SPIDERS IN HER MOUTH, TRIED TO CHEW ON STONES, URINATED ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR AND LICKED IT UP.

And I always kept thinking, I remember the night, I kept thinking the coals in the fire are like me – ashes, I’m ashes. On my skin.

If you blow it off me, the fire glows underneath. My love, my love, my love – how I hate you. I wish you’d come back to me. I love you.
[she picks up another doll] I love you. I have to touch you.
[she begins melting the doll in a candle]

I have to poison you my loves I’m Medea, mistress of poisons, poisoning herself. I have to. I don’t have a choice. The script is already written; I can’t help it. O Jason, my love...you were my whole...you were everything. I loved fucking you. There's nothing I can do. I'm alone. You're never so alone as when you have children. They don't help. They make it worse. I can't do anything for them. It’s the best way. It's...it's worse than anything I ever would have thought. I thought of it again, and I thought "yeah, sure, in a minute. I’m making a cup of tea now, or I’m cleaning, or I have to make a phone call, and then I completely forgot about it. And then I had to go out to the store, and then after a while I came back. I was sitting there. And then I’d opened the bottle stop me

stop yourself No give me back my death, my children's death. I don't want them to live. Living is terrible.

PROJECTION: THE TAROT VIII OF SWORDS

I was Ophelia, the one the stream could not hold up,
the prostitute, the whore, yes, that's what I was,
I see it very clearly now, I was the one with her wrists slit
open, with her head in the oven, I was the one with the
overdose, my hero was heroin -- snow, whitest snow was
on my lips. I was Snow White. And now I'm still freezing
Huddled in the twilight so cold I'm so cold without my
blood. Searching for the day But yesterday, I made a
breakthrough. Yesterday I stopped torturing myself,
murdering myself. When will it come I am alone now, I am
alone with my legs, with my breasts, with my cunt. I break
through the walls of my prison -- the chair, the table, the
bed. I annihilate the battlefield that my home always was.
Yes, I'm done with it. I pull down the door so the wind can
come in The empty night wind

Come on, blow winds, blow all the recipes all over the place, the dish towels, the diapers, the condoms. I break through all of my limits. I smash all the windows. [She overturns the vanity.] Take the locks from the doors, take the doors from their jambs. And then HA, for my absolute masterpiece, I with my bloody hands, you know, as though I'd just gotten through with a chicken, or a turkey, a Thanksgiving turkey I had to rip open, put breadcrumbs in place of its guts, oh yes, that was me; often I looked down at my bloody hands, dishwashing soapy hands, I thought -- this, this is my *life* -- but now, with my blood-stained hands I rip up the photos of the men I have loved [photos of various men are ripped] who have fucked me here, fucked me there, on the bed, on the table, on the floor, against the wall. I set fire to the walls of my prison [about to set fire to photos] -- no, that's wrong, I *was* my prison. And so now, now -- I set fire... to...myself. **OPHELIA WALKS OFF IN HER SHROUD.** [She is naked]

Do not think you see pages burning. You see celebration.
Now you see the invisible words, the indelible words.
Written in the air In the water In the earth Written in fire.
Don't think you see paper burning. You see celebration.

Terminal city. I was staggering around the terminal city where light is entombed, the coffins of light standing up along the sky line. The terminal city. I was out there, the fire gleams of the distant street lights on the roads. Lost, as I knelt on the pavement. Medea was searching for her dead children in the dust of the city. And there was this – for some reason it struck me so funny – there was a single tree rising up through this grating in the sidewalk. I was so drunk I sort of latched onto it. The yellow dry leaves trembled in the breeze. Cars of adolescents hurtled down the dark streets. There were voices calling out to me. I couldn't see from where: Hey lady, give ya 20 bucks for a blow job. Medea, you have inhaled the white smoke of autumn. Fires consume the fallen leaves. Leaves bearing the blood stains of lost children.

V

People gather in clumps: the interests, the conversations
 diverge, veer off, branching in all directions;
 or perhaps the groups are like amoebas, absorbing
 each other, growing, dividing in a ragged meiosis,
 opening to admit new members, new events
 which are taken up into the economy of the mass;
 it then immediately alters, fragments,
 a perceptible shiver runs through it
 as people adjust their postures, and the space around each
 of them
 is charged and subject, now, suddenly, to hundreds of small
 alterations,
 as though the interval separating one person from the next
 were a kind of receptive organ
 or a medium of reception and transmission,
 like a radio receiver, one which could neither be
 turned up nor be turned down, nor entirely shut off.
 Then through hundreds of indefinable adjustments
 the mass breaks up to ragged clusters,
 groupings neither of design nor randomness,
 moving silently among the darkening structures, in the
 harlequin light.
 At some point the light becomes a translucent medium,
 streaked with dusty gold and shot with crimson, although
 it is never quite clear just when this happens,
 this ultimate density of light itself, its new and visionary
 depths:
 blue is more like purple, red is more like black,
 and the rich deep green of the grass is dimmest amber
 tinted with a copper wash and pointed, as it were,
 with the vaguest of gold floss just here and there.
 Strangely, now, people seem like bees,
 and have become more active

with the sundown; the hum of conversation
sounds like the buzzing of a thousand bees,
or as the buzzing of a thousand bees would sound
if it were somehow silent. The crowds milling in the public
square

exhibits a chaotic fluency and fluidity,
although it is slowed to the pace of ritual:
anger is attenuated in the silences of backs and shoulders,
in the mute aggression of gestures and brief glances;
buildings towering in the brazen, somber air

are hives, huge and terrifying ones. They move, these
people,
to and fro among the various scattered and visible points,
a kind of circuit appearing and disappearing –
virtual nodes or centers of interest glimmer here and there:
vibrations of communion and then of near disgust,
moments of a striking constellation – significant and yet
opaque,

moments attractive and repellent, comportments
of various and of varying powers, moods taken up,
things in currency, interpreted, misconstrued,
suffered and enjoyed alone, and yet vibrant listening too,
and also speaking without listening. The light is

fading out –
becoming more a presence, more pronounced as it declines.
It is as though something were moving away far up ahead,
vanishing into the distance, or simply dispersing;
perhaps it is the world, gone now just out of reach
of eye and ear, of even the hand itself, the very air.
The trees, now almost black, are outlined with faint yellow
along the earth rim's burning edge. As you move your head
or change position, bright shards and streamings
from the markings, portents, through the gathering depths
and black wicker-work of branches – space charged –
haunt your peripheral vision. Through the tree scraps so

near
 you can see, around an occasional head of gold and
 sparkling light,
 the expanding dusk-aura, the depths
 and the gathering dark trenches. It is as though
 one heard a door closing far in the sunset.
 The sounds of the street are more pronounced with twilight
 and the silence of the air is more still and deep,
 the scent of the river seems to come from far
 and has a foreign, pensive, and melancholy feel. Anything
 that tells of time
 and distance brings melancholy with it at twilight;
 then distance is most penetrating, palpable; time most
 slowed, delayed.
 Then, these both, though uncanny, must be taken in with
 every breath,
 and the eye now, as though definitively surprised, more
 open, searching,
 takes into itself this startling, strange element,
 the dimension of *afar*: an unaccustomed language
 is given to the mind, whose words are subtly darkened.
 The people before me who, in a sense, are no longer
 people,
 seem to feel this as well: a kind of shiver goes through
 them,
 a change of key, a quieting. It is as though one had to stand
 motionless
 in a narrow spot while vast areas of longing,
 light-drenched,
 opened up around us on all sides.
 Yet the horizon remains merely the horizon of the earth.
 How many of our thoughts, even our hearing and seeing
 too,
 arise from this experience of space, our unsuspected
 awareness
 of the boundary, an open and reverberant source,

holding light, moving with our moving,
marked by our buildings, delineated by the hills.
But in the evening the horizon becomes more subtle,
darker, almost palpable, less definite, though still apparent
to the eye.

Light deepens and is a medium no longer merely carrying
our thought but carrying itself as well,
the visible evocation of distance, time, and death.

The eye must now be open in an almost tactile way
and becomes an organ more of feeling and reception
than of projection and design. The world is denser
and yet lightened by the shadows, space grows vastly
distant

and yet intimately near. The eye, responsive to an
enigmatic presence
now must hear and feel; the ear, called outward by the eye,
must open to the world, which now is full of an almost
imperceptible activity, silently choiring voices.

The horizon, closer yet more sharply distant,
is smaller and yet grand as with the grandeur
of what is seen against the background of an ending.

The world becomes a kind of living ruin: space and light,
now both intimate, palpable, theatrically expanding, yet
oppressive,
thicken it and shatter it, they crowd it with a thousand
spectral forms.

Everything is an echo of something else, hinting
of somewhere else and leading us
to that place which, everywhere, is beckoning.

Where? one asks, *where?* and *Nowhere Here Beyond* is the
answer.

But I know that to survive is all.

And so the sky is beautiful tonight,
and empty, a deep blue-violet, a hyacinth-like blue down
toward the east

where the end of light is lingering in yellow and faint
green.

The sky is beautiful. I walk out, looking always
toward the depths of it, seeing how they go on so far.

BOOK THREE

LIGHT IN ASHES, OR THE SECOND LIFE OF FIRE

I

Where there was part of you, your breath let's say
clouding up the window in the school room
when everybody else had gone outside,
and yet within that oval of breath steam
already you could see a shrinking at the edges and a
bleeding through
of what had been behind, as if the peripheral
should slide back in toward center, having been banished
by, incredibly, a mere breath from your open mouth
out of which there hadn't come the slightest sound –
astonishing. It really was astonishing, it's true.
(I'm told that means to turn someone to stone.)
You were quite still for just a moment.
Or was it rather that you could have moved
and everybody else was frozen stiff?
Yet they were still outside. Did they stand there blankly,
maybe even all chalk white,
like the people in those things by what's his name?
Or were they really moving after all?
And what were they really doing, what were they seeing,
hearing, touching? Yes, and all
outside that one small room, outside of you.
This was the part you had been missing all along,
and still are even now. So where there was this part,
there now will be the whole. That's the kind of operation
that we're running here, just so you understand
(charmed words I know, impossible ones too,

implausible at any rate) how everything proceeds, and must:
the gatherings at midnight, shudderings at daybreak,
the midday glory pouring out its light ecstatically
toward empty space where we had taken up
our postures of self-abasement, abandonment, and pain,
some on their knees, or on all fours, others running
frantically in horror or in fear. No, they would not be
the sacrificial victim, the elect, or else we all would be,
the knife of black obsidian
hanging invisibly above us by a thread.
And even now in the draped and muffled exchanges
hidden in the dark recesses of the mirror,
that glimmering spot of oil right before the light's
turned on,
just before the painter takes his brush away,
the merely actual and imaged fusing for just one instant,
in a single pole between brush tip and cloth
with just a thread of paint connecting them,
as summer lightning connects the sky to the earth –
yes, even in those flows and hurrying, delays,
that mark your entrance into day
and wandering adulthood, ushering your breath
into one corner of it all – this room that opens outward
all around the beating mind (my god,
how she was screaming – and the blood)
then drawing everything back after them toward night,
even in these there still remains the lost, the always
unknown,
the perennially sought. Is this the whole,
or is it only part? And is it really you there after all? –
just like a photograph, nothing fancy, just a quick snapshot.
Was this what they were thinking when they did the deed
that afterward could never be undone –
conception, childbirth, then circumcision (de rigueur),
and all those other things? But this, though,

isn't really the important list. It isn't even real, you know,
it's fake. The actual itinerary, the syllabus of loss,
is hidden just behind the square green shade
that hangs there in the dark and quiet room,
trimmed by the thin slice of lilac-colored light that visits
you
in the early early hours when everything's worn off.
Or else it's hidden underneath the teacher's skirt.
Go in right now, crawl in right under there and take a peek.
You never know what you might find, or not.
And is it really true a thought which seeks
to know the world free of all constructs, without categories
and without mediation, must be an intuitive thought,
the glass itself discarded for the moment,
for the event come forth? For in this way
you see the onion skin in layer after layer –
a fluid medium, like the tears that have been trapped inside
of it,
yellow like a parchment or cheese rind –
composed of fiber optic threads, ply after ply
stripped off before the light suffused with it,
there between your thumb and fingers, which still retain
-- here too -- a scent long afterward, undetectable perhaps
and yet still there, like the aura of the present
penetrating toward some future state.
As I was saying then, where there was part of you
there now will be a whole. This won't solve anything, of
course,
(as though you needed to be told). The moth of light
inhabiting that corner of the darkened room,
lured by the anti-candle of darkness shedding anti-light,
will follow out the film of rising smoke not there
into a different realm, where you have never been,
nor I myself, and yet I think I know you from somewhere
and if I'm not mistaken that must be the place,
that fissure hanging in the air

above the moment flooded with the memory
of that entire universe just passed,
the opening notch between the night and day.
That's where I saw you once or twice before.
I wondered if that was you.
And now that's where it wants to go;
it drifts and climbs just as my voice must do,
rising in the tide of exaltation as I speak.
Black soot like burning plastic
are its artificial wings, the calculus of reason is its flight,
the dark penumbra of the street its labyrinth.
The moth is just an image of the soul.
Maybe you have your own, I know,
I used to have one too, but somehow something happened
and then another thing, and now I just can't find it
anywhere.
Shut them in the cellar and they grow more full.
The roots reach down a bit, eyes search and crawl.
I think that if she treats all her prisoners this way
she doesn't deserve to have any, that's what I think.
Through that faint L of golden light, a conic section
seeded with blue motes of dust and silvery straw hairs,
the solid bricks of night, the prison wall, pour out
their fatal leak, as blue as milk beneath florescent moons.
Your cup is fallen near your chain, the twisted links
of rib cage, femur, tibia, are difficult to twist into a key.
It sometimes works, it often won't – the key, that is.
There's others that will twist it if you can't.
Yet if the cup is raised up to the light and filled
the water flows into the metal hollow once again,
the metal, like a culvert in the driest river beds
there in deep Los Angeles where the light is like a blade
and yet unseen,
flowing and foaming then, and everything
streams inside of you once more, your skin, revived,
is like a fragile barrier, a borderline to bar the way

against invasion from the depths – your viscera, let's say –
into your real life, the life that storms outside of you,
the others, and the open, and the day itself.

That's the true you, that absence of the you.

You know this now. You see it all so clearly there.

The outer is the inner; the inner, alien.

Your home is elsewhere, here but never here.

We feel the multiplicity of voices

which yet must speak the single multiple *to be*.

The vibratory daybreak round each single instant of the
light,

the schizophrenic calmness that is kept inside of you,

the markings of the sensed, unknowable invisibility,

the memory of pasts, previsions of all futures,

the constant fissioning of substance,

the storming of existence through itself.

Then it was true the moth had come at last,

filtered through the walls themselves

like wing shapes of blood blooming through a soaked
bandage.

Its wings will fold you round – cocoon of breathing,
beating light,

veined with the rivers of the blue green earth,

leaves fallen from the sun-filled trees, burnt orange and
crimson,

lime green and dusty pink eaten with moth holes

where the early frost had burned.

Now breathe the scent of hay built into stacks

and carted to the amber barns; the dark creek flowing

toward the mill descends in rainy silver falls,

carries its lily pads of leaves down flows of mercury

into the foaming sluice; then the rush out into the steady
stream, the slow outspread

that meets the orchard filled with light and golden wasps
alighting

near the mashed and littered windfalls
 scattered on the ground; all around are light-filled trees,

 the cider pressing honey-colored juice, the wide deep
 stillness
 of the harvest and the fall, the warm clear air.
 Then bright suffusing sunset with its night-spread wings,
 low blades of slate-dark clouds, the eye blink closing on the
 grated coals
 as though on other sunsets in memory.
 And yet it may be other memories that fold down over you
 as you lie there in the tent-like green,
 the shadow of tree branches veining darkly through the airy
 skin,
 a kind of lung that blooms there, flower-like;
 the breathing outward into space and time and night
 will draw in other worlds that flow among us silently like
 drafts,
 sifting down like sand, like pollen littering the flower
 petals.

 Sense of the night will infiltrate the khaki dusk,
 and then the full obscurity, a special sense,
 the seventh and last seal on the form you have and make,
 your special and peculiar share, the incommensurable,
 the sense of distances, of spaces held within
 and opening inside to other populations, other paths
 not taken in the founding gatherings, the anabasis
 or first contact of the envoys, heralds with exploratory
 steps,
 the paths of morning leading quickly to the twilight beach
 where shore line wavers into surf
 and endlessly dissolving chains of foam,
 then confused callings in the dark of violent emergency,
 gathering of chaos amid clashing waves, the sense of night.
 There is an unformed and nocturnal space
 which yet is that by which we see,

by which we always and must see;
it harbors a swarming, a constant crowding
of the stuff of darkness, menacing, insinuating.
It is filled with itself, although still empty,
vacant of all character although still threatening;
the undetermined fault, the rumor and the whispering of
horror.

It is here you come upon your other self,
the true one that you shut away, the sense of night:
there in the closet you see him standing
amid old suits like hanging files, your other
and preposterous embodiments, let's see
I haven't worn that old one in a while,
hey look remember that tie,
and there's that Christmas present from aunt Jane,
oh yes that was the thing that what's her name gave me
when was that oh right.

Remember when they sawed Bill Palmer's leg off?
Diabetes did that but go to Mexico
And then the time I had that ankle sprain,
had to go to the emergency room –
behind the green curtain the unseen thing,
and the voices of the doctor and the nurse that side.
I overheard them talking Yes it'd be a blessing
old Tom he's been through a lot
The old man couldn't speak just squeal and moan and
shriek

but mostly squeal just like a little pig but go to Mexico
if the doctor touched him ever so slightly the wrong way –
arthritis so bad that nothing could be moved,
and then a stroke reduced the man to this,
demented and unspeaking only pain.
But go to Mexico the time in eighth grade
when we visited the nursing home –
St. Patrick's day we took these green carnations
we had made out of tissue, passing them around

to all the white-sheeted wrecks in wheels chairs,
 bed ridden skeletons, I got behind somehow
 in our whirlwind cheery passage through the ward
 But go to Mexico one woman prone in her white-sheeted
 bed
 the sheet up to her neck, no movement and no speech,
 but searching eyes seized on the pitiful piece of
 gimmickry –
 the green, that pastel green, she wanted just to see it
 but it had fallen down into some crevice in her sheet, she
 couldn't move.
 I placed it nearer to her shoulder where she could look at it
 no smile, but the hungry eyes searching my face then
 sideways
 toward the single sprig of green, and then I left.
 Yes, that's the way we almost all end up But go to Mexico
 the drugs are there available, the open pharmacies,
 humanity possesses its own death and hence its life
 in Mexico, if nothing else, but go to Mexico.
 There is a darkness. Space-Time
 shaped around black asphalt.
 Tunnel of driving, urine light cones
 half burnt out street lights dimming
 to milky gray with an amber spot,
 rock of crack cocaine pipe stem of metal lamp post
 the empty places in the cracks of the city.
 Roach feelers of car headlights tickling
 the empty skull of night. Dry riverbed of empty road,
 enormous gutter of the river bed itself,
 the concrete gray like ashes in the moon's blue light.
 Something will happen here.
 Booths of florescent beacons here and there
 like shower stalls of dim blue light,
 phone booth with receiver hanging from its cord
 like a suicide, gas stations with enormous orange or mint
 green letters

in cubes of light dusty with an electron haze of spiraling
moths

Something will happen here in these environs.
Moving closer to the lights that make a kind of bracelet in
the night far off
the alley ways with boarded brick warehouses,
parking areas with chain link fences topped with spools of
razor wire,
the newer warehouses of aluminum siding,
corrugated sides, white drainpipes like a huge centipede
stapled to the corner,
pagoda roofs in the blue full moon, abandoned houses with
dirt yards
and dogs chained out in front – Dobermans, Rotweilers –
motorcycles parked
in groups of four and five around the side
the liquor stores with metal bars on windows
spilling lemony light onto the sidewalk,
something will happen here.

The man is driving through, then the police
decide to pull him over at first a routine check
There is a gathering a few words very few get out what's
this it's nothing
where were you headed where where's that all right get
over here
who did he say that's bullshit look don't bullshit me ok
I'm not you're who who's this your girlfriend hey not bad
then at some moment a particular moment
but difficult to locate in one's memory,
a moment much like any other arriving passing gone
not really ever there remembered and then not
But was there ever some one moment previous
when what was done might not have been?
A moment then of time, of history –
a nightstick or the heavy long flashlight
was there a hand raised or an arm, a shout?

Movement, contagious movement, a flashing riot baton
another
The man is on the ground he has no weapon no companions
he has nothing but the concrete he lies on
boots find the stomach ribs the head
the skull is certainly a fragile thing on concrete
at some point there is blood an astonishing amount
from forehead eyes mouth nose a deep gash above the ear
The odd thing about being beaten up is this
it's often quite painless or rather pain is a complex
experience
it isn't the pain of a migraine or a screwed up back
you feel rather – impact, a dull assault
you are aware of tearing jarring
you are enveloped in a haze of anger, fear, assault
which is a thing like insult yet with a visceral intent
a cutting ferocity, the sight of your own blood enrages you
and yet the fear is almost paralyzing
you move so clumsily, stiffened, tensed with panic
you have greater strength and speed they say
and yet no mind or not enough
and no coordination timing, the strength
and speed themselves are not enough
your overwhelming rage will not prevail
They beat you up, you hit the ground, at some point
try to crawl away protect yourself they still keep on
there is a point blows to solar plexus rib cage
make it so that you can't breathe you vomit
the heel of a boot in the kidneys makes you wrench
backward
and then wrench in a different way there is a point
the skull is a fragile thing against concrete
There is something moving around here just under the
pavement,
the dying man must think, beyond the wall,
past the locked doors, within the shadows of the buildings.

There is something in the rhythm and the colors
of the advertising signs, you think this as you're
driving past

weeks or months later, after all the news reports
There is something in the blank regard of policemen
as they look at you. It is the look of power,
which is, by nature, murderous, unless it is restrained
to something else. When is the other not the other
but the self, or nearly so? When is it you there on the
pavement,

in the middle of the ring of polished boots,
in the midst of nightsticks flailing down,
when is it you there bleeding, when is it you
amid the tense aura of outrage, panic, hatred,
when is it you, you pass into the other's body
when the voice that they address you with is felt
inside your memory, yes, then you are part of them
in having them part of you, you pass into the other
when you look at them, their face their gestures,
their movements in the space between you both,
you pass into the other's body when they pass by you,
there on the street, in the middle of the day,
they do not notice you, preoccupied, they make their way
across the busy street, and you likewise preoccupied
have scarcely noticed them, and yet a transformation
has occurred, a transubstantiation; the parking meters,
stop signs, the cars and trucks, none of these things
becomes a part of you. But human bodies
merge in drawing near to each other,
they touch without touching, speak silently,
commune in mutual ignorance, shape and suppress each
other,

gather toward unapproachable communion,
warding irremediable contesting and contagion;
it is this way they are together, clothed with each other,
naked constantly, inexhaustible, fragile, mortal.

II

Mysterious woman, this is your vacant house
and I enter it by night, a green lamp
in my hand – a match flares,
and the palm's shell, like a bright conch floating,
shelters the light's voice
from the clamor of silence. Dark spots of light,
circles, and a leopard is moving – space trembles,
shaken, the corners illuminated faintly.
I place the lamp on the floor, the green lamp.
Though averse to all fire, the quick, the numerous
visitors flicker back, fitting themselves
through the light's splinters,
they're like eyelashes, hair line cracks
pulled in toward a green iris; outside,
the summer storm, the hurricane starting up,
winds searching idly through the trees
like fingers through dark fur, mysterious woman.
Occasional visitor, hidden among tree branches,
I've gathered the dark leaves from nearby,
and placed them in a pile; pulled from their fragrant closets,
the geodesic trees they flaked from, stiff, coated
with pale sequins, residual star light,
and now they're my gift to you, I pour them out
from my shirt front, here and now, I litter them
over the pyre of empty space and time
as it looks up into my gaze, an open well,
that widens through the dark
like the iris of an eye,
and the well cries out, it cries out
into my silence, filling me with echoes,
the echoes of other times and places,
of other selves, and the voices of these

are shouted into my ears, the voices
of these are ringing in the darkness
like haloed flames, the voices of these others
are pouring like sand all around me,
running down all around me, like water
off a roof, like lighter fluid
over charcoal, like a shirt drawn past my ears
and over my face, sleeves
pulled past my arms like streams –
and warm, both light and dark – poured through
my sleep with many noises
and with filtering bird song,
and I awake into the huge night sky
littered with distant suns, I awaken
into myself, as a limb wakes up
by being filled with blood, as a branch
awakens filled with sun and water, filled with sap,
and the self that I awaken into
is palely littered with star remnants
fallen down from their great height, and yet still
I pour these out for you, these sun parched leaves,
light veined tissue, parchment documents
discarded from the darkest, the highest reaches
of the forest where snow is drifting down through limbs,
making its dim and tardy figures. In the corridors
that reach from where I am into the places
where I might be, have been, will be,
I see the images, like shapes at the bottom
of a pool, partly of light, and partly of darkness,
beckoning, warning, the glimmering enigmas.

And so in the gospel of Thomas, which is the second
life of fire,
the gospel of fire therefore, the inner surface of the flame
and the outer covering too, the inner membrane
and the husk of the fire both must be consumed.

For there will come a time when you will seek this,
the power that it gives to you, you and those arriving later,
when you will want this, need it very much
and what I have to say to you,
but when that time arrives, you will not find me here.
So the expressed unfolds, there in the bookstore
the words flow all around you, passageways,
so long since anyone has spoken so,
all commerce now, of course; we know that,
still, there are those who, watching, listening,
access the inter-voice, the interceding
murmuring word flow. My words
were heard by the empty space above the lamp,
by the brown and twilight dimness of the room, the stained
and blossomed paper covering its walls,
patterns formed by water seepage, fading rose bouquets
that looked like places on an ancient map –
the world drawn crudely and with
a child-like effort at depiction, as opposed to
the true cartographer's mathesis – the words
lost in the uncharted regions of the ceiling
where the smoke stream of my cigarette
made a kind of semi-visible and filmy scroll,
rolling up and up and up. And I
imagined, then, a moth, a large blue-violet moth,
the color of a morning glory, say,
of a kind I never actually have seen,
tropical perhaps, unreal, unavoidable –
the moth, the image of the naked soul
that in ecstatic, suicidal self-projection
drops straight into the deep worm hole of time
hidden in each instant, in each point of space, and then
sucked through that narrow tube
is spewed out and into the next moment
of its dim and frenzied self-exploration
which then becomes at points, or at one point,

alignment with the fiery white anther of a candle,
always just one – another turn, the hairpin bend
of space-time leading to other regions,
somewhere, yet not empty space –
then it was surprised again, stolen upon,
by the same white searing light. Another turn, another...
(somewhere near an orchard which yet is far away
in the recollective hollow of a rain wet autumn night,
phosphorous thumb print of the moon above,
slate blue lily pads of cloud). But then again
the candle's whitest burning – until the final correlation
reaches the tube-like and delicately pointed legs,
the pin points of the feet, pale yellow,
and the parchment-colored body
hairy as the anther of a flower,
the vascular webbing and linen gauze of the wings –
the moth at last matched up with the ultimate
and single point, beyond any conceivable geometry,
image of consummation drawing me
through the deep time hole, caught
in the helix of ascent amid wing ash,
the burning paper so thin, the thin-skinned
moth-wing beatings of nocturnal flight
focused in the burning glass of impact
with a candle flame. The lore of the Egyptians
gives to me seven selves, auras within and around me,
seven eyes in the peacock tail spectrum of my fate,
seven cards in the hand held out into darkness.
The lore of the Egyptians gives to me seven cells
in the infinite honeycomb left
on the sands flushed in the iodine of sunset.

The lore of the Egyptians gives to me seven powers,
seven candles, small votive lights
held on the back of my outstretched arm
as I make my way through the tunnel of darkness,

night tunnel filled with empty desert winds
blown from the edges of the earth,
from long long before the kingdoms of sand.
I know there are seven small candles
held out on the back of my arm outstretched,
dripping their hot wax onto my skin, tenacious stings
of what are no longer bees, hot wax
sealing the gaps, the lacunae
of the written script of my flesh itself
before it is read out aloud into the light, before
in the outcry of the light at daybreak
it can shout itself back, somewhere beyond the sun.
O when will it ever be read out aloud in the light?
Or must it wait until the final severing
of light itself with the earth, in the darkness there
somewhere beyond the western lands?
Wind-tattered candlelight
in the dark tunnel of passageways – the first candle,
the one that is nearest my heart
is called REN, the name that is secret.
I walk through the corridor, the candle
cutting out shapes in the night before me,
tossing them every which way.
The walls are concrete, the color of sand.
There is no light but the candle,
the corridor is like a well. I move downward
and downward, a bucket lowered slowly
to the starry surface of the sky. The wind out of nowhere,
and the candle flame ripples, tattering,
then gone. Hands in the darkness
around me, moving over my body.
I feel the fingers on each, each finger
as though quite separately an intelligence.
Tall presences standing around in a circle
slowly, quickly narrowing to the space of my ribs,
their pressure against me as I breathe,

then further continuing pressure,
their open eye sockets like octagonal
cell holes in an empty hive. Their mouths –
but there is only one mouth, directly
opposite as I stare ahead
into the twisted knothole of a tree,
a gaping space crying upward in the midst
of the torturous wood grain,
flesh straining upward and screaming
from the roots in the dark infinitely far beneath me
and upward into the dark of the vertical well.
Angelic spirits inhabit the desert, and
the voices of women are present too,
yet in their voices there is
the seething of sea foam, bees of light
drawing the needle of honey through the eye of the comb,
an infinite gallery of chambers hidden
in the crystal of a sand grain. The numerous
shades of darkness fill the octagonal cells
of night because of the voices of women.
They are setting a bed of sand and small mica stones
next to the tiny ship I descry at the passageway's far end.
Candle light streams on the model of wood
with its paper sails – sea surf of white rose petals
flaking like eczema from the waves of the moon sea,
from the plane of the desert
as it grows openly bright with bluish dawn.
Yet the walls of stone, of ivory and concrete
are still massed above me, around me.
I drift through the tunnels of silence and night
like a blood cell through the vessel of an eye.
And then forms, men of radiance and casual devastation
clothed with the opals of fire and sunset,
spread wide the razors of holy light, icy and gold,
in the sands falling through the waist of the hourglass,
there, where a thousand streaming serpents

climb the spilling apex of gold, the silt of sun rivers.
The first of the candles, the first of the selves,
the one that is near to my wrist, held
on the back of my hand We were eating leaves
out in the backyard by the empty swimming pool
Yeah it's a thing we do sometimes
I don't know how we ever started drunk one night I guess
got to be traditional so anyway lights the way to the
catacomb
where the vats are held, in the darkness the stair steps
end the elevator shaft wind tunnel with its descending
cable like the frenulum of the column rising high into the
night
in the first jar the intestines the ant farm tunnel
and centipede peristalsis of blue green intestine walls
Inside they were passing a pipe around
I never bother with it though had this great cocaine
and this stripper you wouldn't believe this chick we know
that human languages
are unique among animal signaling systems for they
combine
the relational meanings characteristic of mammal languages
with the descriptive object orientation of insect systems,
and so
we may conclude that humans have a mammalian and an
insect neurology
combined as it were intertwining with each other
The story of Franklin as told in the Autobiography
is the story of technique, of actions upon other actions.
Master a technique, and you will solve
the problem of your life. Not unfamiliar even now.
Shall we say it's the illustration of that tremendous concept,
the machinic assemblage? Franklin is a body without
organs,
his two large puffy rolls float him down river;

he has an electrical plug attached to his navel. The game
board

that he lands on is the streets of Philadelphia
all laid out like a grid, in fact a grid,
radiant in winter light, burning in summer sun,
the purity of pure exchange is the greatest purity
The rules of the game are the Constitution the Bill of
Rights and sundry texts
of which more later. The idea of the game has replaced the
theatre.

The war continues but we do not see it
Text replaces torture or becomes itself a means toward it,
torture continues though, of course,
although we do not go to it anymore.
The law is written on the body, true, yet
Edwards himself was really very deeply moved
looking straight ahead Although he had them rolling in the
aisles

His text the first American theatrical success
albeit designed for an invisible theatre
his vision of torment was the Hamletmachine of its day
black box or tunnel created by a worm hole
through the piles of sacred texts the fallen leaves
so inquisition thus is every law
and yet all a kind of game a concept or rather
a conceptual technique expressed in a theatrum, an inherent
visibility

The Sadean vision is dispersed into the order of these
things themselves
And by a printing press a newspaper a someone standing up
to talk

This happens very fast, almost simultaneously
Edwards and Franklin are contemporaries
twisted as it were intertwining with each other
Where is the name of the beloved left? Carved into stone,
or written in the sand that's glassed with waves,

or gouged into a tree **VOICECURRENTS/TOXINS**

There are conceivably, and yes one must admit,
any number of equally good ways to say
any number of equally good things, stray littering
of aftermath, or trauma as they sometimes call it
and yet it's not as if we don't all know
precisely where each of us has spent the day,
at the new mall or maybe the crack house
You know that little place right
on the corner there I always like that one
I do too don't you oh yes we take the kids there
all the time they enjoy it and Bill's mother too
And really it always means so much
to me so very much when one of my readers
even though I have such golden hair
and married that famous reactionary
philosopher at Harvard Yale Princeton
oxfnard kembwitch something something
takes the time to write and even spells scans too I do
appreciate

And one thing that I will say is what Sid really meant
by syllable count and this is going to sound
completely incredible coming from a post Bay Area
post avant perspective is that the line
and I mean this to be taken with a grain of salt
admittedly my male-centric bias but what
I don't see Jennifer hi Jen hi Terry oh isn't she
adorable and the other thing is that Bill Williams
can suck my because he just no yes I'm sorry
Because because that's it and I mean this
piece of shit as my mother called me once
can you imagine those were my angels
frigid and wandering the deep spaces
of the night through the window

and yet they were the fields but what
I remember most clearly about him now
was the wonderful color of his eyes
Not exactly green and not exactly red
But something in between enchanting
and mysterious and very much him
It was because she said she did that I
thought that the yogurt might have been
actually sour because otherwise you know
And it is always so inspiring I think
when the evening sun slits its wrists
bleeds into cloud gauze bandages pink and orange
yellow of infected dressings carbon
scabs of roofs beneath auroras somewhere
On a beach knocking his head against
A door jamb and when they showed him
The instruments he changed his mind
At that very moment the world imagined
Was only one thing circumcision
Is generally performed for hygienic reasons
The infant is still he evacuates
It's better for women though
Cleaner and smoother mother said to me
I decided to have the doctor
It was my way of attacking my
Own father I have never admitted this
A definite satisfaction yes
But where the philosophical rubber
condom that is meets the political
something something something
is clearly evident and constitutes
and manifests and seeks to and proposes
Wops are niggers with short memories
the dj explained and yet we are informed
that though they are constructed
subhuman but not exactly

In this well-known thinker's stained underwear
yes he had her stained underwear
in his back pocket when he was arrested
outside the dormitory the girl's parents were distraught
said they didn't actually want her back
When they told me it would be a boy
that's when I decided to mosey over there
and see I just couldn't deal with it Heather
oh I know it's just as well
They disconnected his phone this would
be an example of the outrageous
and irresponsible statements he has
made for lunch today ah yes hey
that would be the marinated
dog leavings sir dog leavings
ah yes yes turds oh I see yes quite
Well I think that would do nicely
for me very good sir and for the lady
Well I guess I'll just have to try that too
don't that sound good and to drink sir
we recommend the canine urine
Piss? yes sir actually oh yes of course
What kind would that ah yes today sir
it is the St. Bernard you may be familiar
The most venomously homophobic
reactionary and deeply
endowed wood grain of the office space
An' we doan lock yer kine roun hyer
en ah meeen git My name is Ralph Mud
and my name's Jane Xit and we are
executive editors of Sodomy Review
and we would like to invite your contributions
Blood ran down his face like water
down a haystack his intestines
were shiny blue green a hose looped down
onto his thighs sternum torn away

like a chunk of wall paper
the heart beats visible inside
white male privilege I heard
The multiple discourses of feminism
are predicated on historicizing
male privilege in all its forms
mushroom mushroom one day
when I was playing with Ma's
underwear I found
an eight inch dildo in her
dresser drawer naughty naughty
theorist Jane Xit explained
But Ralph was an authority
on mushroom mushroom mushroom
something something something
Post-colonial disinfectant
tinted the blooming clouds
as urine does a bed sheet
hemorrhoidal fissure of sunset
What kind of party would you like
to have if you knew that you
would have to play with everybody there
no matter how sticky their hands
might be oh a lot of frosting
on your little artery swollen
Ain't it he jest bout dun tookin
her very very very but it
was Ralph Mud who in the year bla bla
demonstrated the posterior analytics
to be the coziest little uh uh
On that seventh day black sun
at morning pack up your oxycodone
sailor take warning if you actually
had to had to had to play
with everybody there
what kinds of rules would you

make up well here's what I
would do and maybe you would to
Pretend the sun is a blood clot
sun artery spraying splashing
the earth's cheek right in its eye
the earth strangles the son of a bitch
chokes the god damn thing right off
stomps on it hey Archie how you doon
under there just wanted you to know
got one a yer books the other day
Ralphie boy uz with me too
an I got some a hisn an all
and sum a yurn spread a little
maynaze out on to hit real good
hisn ah mine yurn I just used afterward
noe wudda mine yes that lovely
splendid splendid splendid
Harold said a raisin lodged
up his nostril fucked this white trash
bitch one time figure like a boy
but had these large dark
crinkly strangely tough
sort of almost chewy nipples
hmih hmih hmih she would pant
and sort of whisper
sucking on my tongue as though
it were a pipe and she were going
pmwawh, pmwawh, pmwah
soaking the bed sheet right under
my balls and my balls too
she liked to be on top and bounced
herself on the trampoline of my
abdomen always used a diaphragm
cheating on her husband a professor
of communications at ___ college
in the town of ___ and her name

was well I can't tell you that
of course but her initials are
LU and she was good friends
with a guy by the initials of
JT I don't think she fucked him
although she slept with
almost everybody else
even me she never actually
enjoyed oral sex seemed to
be holding her breath the while
she won the __ award and now
teaches at __ college her middle
initial is A and her confirmation name
yes she told me everything
begins with A as well so that
her full initials is that the term
are LAAU now how many other
female poets in the US are there now
with JUST THOSE LETTERS
and she told me one time over lunch
that she'd slept with 47 men
before her husband but had been
Inorgasmic since she laughed when
I told her my NUMBER which
she insisted I do she laughed out loud
but are those really really her initials *her real ones*
or maybe it's really UL
or maybe it's really UL upside down
which would be sort of the number 7
and an upside down cup
or maybe it's that PLUS THREE
which means that she wears
a cup and is 73 years old
a mature woman poetess
wearing an athletic protector
I read that XY's little princess X

had died at the age of 103
I was distraught but maybe
the DEPTH OF HIS GRIEF
will inspire him something something
John Xit is an American
writer and professor he teaches
Women's Studies at Hemroyd College
his wife Jane Xit is and the thing
I find most appalling it's beyond
appalling Ron it's utterly and the
most strident vicious scurrilous
anti-something something is
strident vicious scurrilous
unsophisticated you forgot unsophisticated
naïve naïve you forgot naïve
unsophisticated homophobic you forgot homophobic
misogynist mysoginist anti-Semitic
anti-Semitic racist racist
eurocentric phallocentric doo doo
doo doo? fuck I know man where
you getting that shit and the thing
weighs in at and to say that it's
unreadable it was shrimp fried rice
with a burrito and baked potato
on the side and though I've had
better baked potatoes at Wendy's
I must say the presentation was
I found it to be a perfectly satisfying
piece of theatre said Margaret
Duckie was writer in residence
at Hemroyd College she knew the Xits
John and Jane and was god mother
to their little dachshund Auschwitz
isn't that adorable Margaret especially
liked teasing its little you know what
down under there speaking of down under

there was a cow I mean a woman
from Australia in the department
her mother ran a sheep farm
down there her father liked sheep
very very much but he died fuck him
her mother liked them somewhat less
but knew them she knew them she was knowing
she was a knowing woman she was a strong knowing
woman from

down under she was a life affirming
woman of the outback the feminist collective
in cooperation with the women's discourse initiative
the women's health initiative the women's legal initiate
the women's research something something
the women's sexual reentry response guidelines and in
cooperation with
the rape crisis hot line the rape awareness center
the rape advocacy initiative the rape victims legal resource
home page

the rape victims mushroom mushroom
the rape management legal task force
the rape prosecution initiative the rape
prosecution initiative the rape prosecution initiative
But the depth and utter vileness of this piece of shit
scum bag sub-human anti-feminist is reached when he
and I say this with a grain of salt two grains perhaps and
here

I've got to say something I know I'm not supposed to
actually admit this
but when I was pregnant I really wanted a boy and the
reason

I have many deep personal philosophical reasons but I
want to contribute to society a man who is caring and
thoughtful and responsible
and loves women and affirms them in all ways at all times
and she was telling me how the feminist

farm collective in cooperation with
the women's sexualities studies and sexual
diaspora studies and the editorial
collective of Sodomy Review John Xit
and Jane Xit editors were telling me
we were having a coke out by the dumpster one evening
I heard she yes yes and with that oh my
God Jennifer I almost Stacey was saying
and she was really debating in their mind
well the situation the women's studies collective
was suggesting that she and the committee on white males
headed by Hypopstasia Glyph we call her Stace
he was the famous poet GK distinguished
and well known for being so distinguished
tall good looking guy teaches down in the city somewhere
real nice voice real charmer and she was
so she was trying to decide it was a dilemma
she was on the horns of a dilemma as they say
The street had patches of leaves on it
they had fallen down from the trees
it was like a tongue with canker sores

SPEAK TO MY SCROTUM

THE DELIGHT OF MOTHS

THIS IS MY ANUS, SILLIMAN

THIS IS MY ANUS, O GRAHAM

Your poetry is a suppository
in the rectum of language
O Pinsky, O Graham, O Silliman
speak to my scrotum, your poetry
it is very good for some things
it is an enema in the sigmoid colon of words
O Silliman, O Pinsky, O Gluck, O Graham
Graham says, observe my hair
Is it not magnificent? it is
a mistral of hair yes a williwaw of hair
Aurora Borealliss of hair

bridegroom night of hair
 electric pleroma of hair
 Observe my jewelry, Is it not magnificent?
 Observe my black, I wear only black
 I even use black toilet paper at home
TO BE CONTINUED The western clouds
 are ranked in shoals, in flake-like strata,
 low sunset clouds like shale blue stepping stones float in an
 orange-pink light –
 they flow in low flat corrugations like structures of rugose
 paper,
 blue gray and smoke gray burning at its slowly unraveling
 edge –
 in movement now continually the layers flow and shift –
 or else they are a powder violet where the sun burns
 welding torch gold,
 metallic white at the edge the color of molten aluminum.
 We have only stopped just now to watch,
 yet the sun is low, the air already growing late,
 not dimming yet, but quieter as though somehow expectant;
 it's surprising that the sunset makes no sound,
 the evening has grown still, everything is silent.
 Light changes just perceptibly in a wide slow arc
 from the deepening succession of burnt yellow and
 pea-green hills
 in the distance to the north. We stand here on a hill,
 one of a series of waves rippling northward
 toward the glacier-rubbed plateau and then to Canada.
 The green and amber dusty golden land
 hill after hill after hill is like a dark green carpet that one
 shakes
 in a slow wave before setting it in place.
 The earth turns silently, unfolding itself so slowly
 underneath us,
 its geological formations shifting, flowing, floating,

like the waves on a hidden sea. The unknown, the
unnoticed world,
the earth, is turning, yes, and yet we never feel it.
For a moment we both think that we would like to walk
away,
to turn our backs, simply not to watch it for a while,
the overpowering light. And yet we can't.
How gradually its changes come and yet how rapidly.
In a moment we are watching it again.
The sun is lower as though retreating past the far edge of
the world,
like a player stepping out of bounds, dragging along
the night that comes in after it. Deep tides of stars,
luminous gold of cloud sand bars, burning strata, pink and
orange,
violet and mauve, orange crossed with iodine and molten
brass,
the fan shaped veils suffused with radiance,
floating weightless stepping stones
always darkening with their burning edges,
between islands drift and darken too, the gathering of night.
Black swallows crossing and re-crossing in their realms of
gold.
The earth is growing still, and quieter, settling.
Yet the colors will not cease or be less beautiful.
We're told it's chemicals that bring out
the luminous bright gold, intense unearthly pink,
a hellish visionary orange, poisonous colors
tint the undersides of blue gray clouds for miles.
The sunset's light is like a cone whose vanishing point
is fixed somewhere beyond the distant char of hills,
beyond the poisoned atmosphere. And the light is dense,
a medium.
The cone of light is more than light,
but is the visible announcement of some horrifying process,
unearthly and yet natural, expected.

The thought of men and angels adrift
within it as in a fluid medium,
of disembodied souls, is both more plausible and yet more
terrible –
adrift like motes of hay dust in a barn,
floating in the infinite depths of the sky.

III

And finally where do we conclude once
we have started to unravel all the tiny strings –
they really are quite small – that make up
any given object? So in the light
that streams so dusty from the shaded lamp
I notice vibratory lines, like whiskers possibly,
and in the streaming of the sunrise
as it rays out over blue-black rooftops in the winter light
are etched-in lines resembling the fur-like threads
that reach down through the structure of ice cubes,
ice threads of winter dawn that reach along
the surfaces of frozen space itself –
blue and violet cloud shoals,
lavender pink steam from a black chimney
rising straight in the still air of daybreak.
Yet this is only to repeat the phrase
that we had been provided with, that everything without
is surely a within as well, or should one say instead?
Within what? you might ask. That's what I'd like to know.
Here I am, a person in my prime of life,
successful in my career and everything
and still I have these moments when dream and existence
smoothly interpenetrate. The office corridor at dusk,

the brick communications building
with its white aluminum electronic dish thing
on the roof, the dazzling purity and shimmer
of aluminum against the intense blue sky,
the way the row of ginko trees will rise up from the
pavement
in the purple dusk so eerily like a row of disheveled women
coming toward you with some unavowable intent:
they must impart a message to you, a mysterious one,
in secret, and must do so without your being actually
aware of it.

You feel this even as, laughing to yourself,
you walk on past their dry leaves rustling
like parchment streamers in the cool night air.
And yet how fast you've still outrun your fate,
that messenger running after you, sack of old newspapers
on his back, cap in hand, waving to you – hey there, wait,
slow down.

And yet you never do, or can. Slow down, that is,
just like the rabbit or the tortoise or the – who, then, is it
now?

Some character. And what an odd, odd text it is,
curiouser and curiouser – the twilight, that is, as it fills
the empty public square with shadows lengthening,
the buildings darkening to dense and lustrous cubes of glass
and steel,
quaint cobblestones of the pedestrian mall, glimmering
stepping stones
just visible above a surface of total darkness.

What's down there? you might ask. Oh, you don't want to
know.

The tortured are there, for one thing, in their cages,
the place where all the evil and unlucky
(is there a difference nowadays?)
have to go. But in the mirror of the twilight
you can see these radiant and invisible figures,

not yet erased, against the huge blackboard
of empty space, a kind of theatre projection in a way,
as though you were a visitor from someplace else
and this were being shown just for you,
the hospitality of the place, as you might think of it.
Where are you running though, still so fast,
incessantly, to keep in place? And why not use your wings?
It's true you might get blown all around,
end up somewhere in the future, or the past (let's say),
but there are ways of dealing with that sort of thing:
the secret ring, the talisman, the inconspicuous tattoo,
these sometimes get you by, so that the guardians
will let you through the gate and into that other time
you really wanted to inhabit all along.
Yes, you were asking me something, but I was outside
and you were inside, or you were inside and I was out,
I can't remember which, and now
I can't remember what the question was,
so that we always got our messages confused,
you there giving the signal to descend,
and I about to step off into space,
or you preparing yourself for all those g's
and I telling the operator: ok, so here we are.
Is anybody on this line right now?
That's what you really want to know,
as you set your foot out on the tightrope
stretched between the roofs – down and down, oh yes, way
way down,
and no, no safety net at all, the janitors removed it.
Well, they were only doing as instructed.
But now it's you, just you. Just you. Look up:
your stomach rises to your throat, almost to your eyes it
seems;
your heart is pounding in the vertigo of blue blue empty
space...
how unbelievable it is. They say the stars will all burn out

And what are all those little things down there? Oh cars,
like little game pegs or something, no they're like beads
you stupid,
don't call me stupid, game pegs what the hell's a game
peg?
It's a peg that you use in a game yeah I got a peg you
can use,
shoved into their little slots or something yeah right
hey you got any more a that yeah it's right here hey thanks
no problem.

So that was the whole problem just right there,
you were always on the outside looking for me
and I was on the inside rummaging around for you.
What do you look like? I'm tall I'm blonde
oh yeah I think we got someone like that
right here eh Charlie we got any tall blonde ones
back there?

So at the very first signs, then, when you notice him or her,
that glimmer in the midst of the still ordinary realm,
the passageways of buildings, corridors, hallways and
office cubicles,

when that remembered and desired face
has only just lately come forward from its hazy ground
of dim light, forgotten music, the aura of presentiment
with which the common things of day and night
disclose and veil themselves, the obliquities of vision
deflected by desire and what defeats desire,
the burgeoning silence of the park light in the afternoon,
the faces of the strangers in the dusk of the city streets,
these fated to become your memory in that peculiar and
tenacious hold
by which we greet and say farewell to what is only, finally,
ourselves,
leave takings in the littering leaves of rain-wet
autumn nights,
before the final, unaccountable disappearance,

expected, desired, even striven for in a sense,
 your name not left in any phone book any longer,
 when the one desired has yet to take their place
 right at the center of your life, but still somewhat
 peripheral,
 draws off a certain something from that center,
 invades it with a sweet disturbance, a rustling confusion
 scattering small gifts -- the scent of something in a drawer,
 the gills of light that open in serrated blinds
 casting incomparable glamour on a bed,
 memories of their passage through a room -- then,
 in that subtle self-division, you experience
 an unexpected supplement as well,
 an Other who is not the desired one, perhaps not even
 a 'who',
 a double rather -- male? female? neither? somehow both?--
 inhabiting the shadowy remainder
 of your vividly multiplying inner life,
 your radiant self-division. Who is this other, haunting your
 perplexities,
 the leaves of your insomnia, your book of many nights?
 An Other without name and without station,
 a background figure surely, hidden always and yet
 always seen.
 And is it not the case that even within the seemingly
 knowable totality of your body, the unforeseeable --
 indeed, the impossible -- is present, raging, in a sense?
 Yet in that opening of light, the instant
 the interior is lured out of itself,
 or rather is defined in such a way, or, not defined
 but recognized
 as really no longer what it thought it was,
 it wakens to another inassimilable context, itself the
 unassimilated,
 itself the unforeseen, the strangely anonymous shadow
 darkening the surfaces of buildings in the trading district

which somehow only now we realize – or are we only
dreaming this? –
has spread out everywhere. Two impossible
twin figures
walk these streets, that is to say the town's not big enough
for both of them.

Which is the I and which, then, is the other?
Which is the word and which the echo of that word?
Which is the dreamer and which the existence dreamed?
How do I get out of here? you say.
We took a wrong turn somewhere back a ways.
But then in the evening when you take
your little fix of heroin out into the yard there,
that kind of rectangle in between the building where they
link fence
and the neighbors didn't really seem to mind,
you always smoked it right up from the foil
stuff's really really like really hey I hear I hear
like really yeah and the golden light is like a kind of chain
link fence
descending amid space, and in that retrospective twilight
and astonishment that always comes you see yourself there
right behind that fence, your fingers hooked among
the radiant diamond pattern that it is,
the diamond back of space that sheds its skin
becoming still more space, infinity of depth so depthless
anyway

yet filled with infinite heartbreaking clarity.
You see the alpha and omega of the city.
It is here we must endure our lives,
attempt to find our happiness amid the leavings and the
refuse.

We ourselves are refuse, aren't we, after all?
Too cowardly to rise, rise up then Lazarus rise up,
rise up then unemployed downtrodden spat upon
rise up young people with no future, technical training

at the commuter college employment at McDonalds
rise up but nothing happens, pigeons flocking in the
winter air,
billowing like an expanding net then settling
around the shoulders of the building opposite.
You hear the traffic from the street. Someone is calling
someone.
They really need to paint that door, gray paint all peeling
off in flakes.
The door grows brown and floats in the dirty tap
water of dusk.
And then it's night, you close your eyes and sleep,
you wake up and it's morning, the television's there.
Hey television, how are ya? blue square a kind of light
portal
in the gray dimness of the room.
She tacked up those old horse blankets or something
over the windows, the light is brownish green around
the edges.
Dark still. Car horns fewer in the street, not very few,
the rhythms different though, or something. Apartment's
really cold.
Get up. The heater's like a piece of cold porch railing,
nothing there at all.
Get coffee. Got to get to work. Heroin makes me
constipated,
but I always take a ton of that senna stuff so in the can
we go
ahh shit the whole damn thing away,
that would be something wouldn't it,
shit out all your problems, what if we could just
get rid of all the scum that's fucking up this fucking society
the jews the niggers all these fucking wop scumbags
CCNY was a decent college I taught there many years,
but when they started letting in just anyone,
these working class Italians were the worst,

the standards became abysmal.
After I put out my book on coprophagia and the
new world order
I just simply left no no well yes of course he did he did
that's right
and then Clifford talked to me about that position at Brown
I wasn't really interested, the dean was nice,
I think Martin used to... see her, as it were.
I think he was on her committee, actually.
Yes, we were reversible, the counterparts
fate had allotted us. This street, these buildings, hallways,
corridors.
the map of the city was a cryptogram,
our hand was pressed straight onto it.
We were imprinted with its currency, bill after bill
after bill,
the sepia and green, the vague masonic pyramid,
the eye in my hand that guides my hand,
the other eye that watches it while it does.
My skin peeled off like the skin of those unfortunates
confined to "the pond"
in wherever that place was. I couldn't see to drive.
The highway was the highway of the damned,
libidinal freeway they called it. Traffic signs drifted
into the dim fishbowl of the windscreen
as the night englobed itself around us,
the landscape floated slightly upward as we sank
into the endlessness and secrecy of the road,
becoming smaller and smaller in the opening mouth
of the continent.
Where is the friend, you ask. Oh friend, there is no friend.

IV

But once you get behind a person's face,
it isn't really them that's there,
it's childhood, not theirs of course, but anyone's.
Then when you lit the candles in the curtained room,
playing that special game that you'd made up,
the stranger from next door was there,
(visiting at odd seasons, every now and then.)
It rained so hard that day, then hail came down,
the hard white grains, the size of corn kernels, gray
and white,
prefigurations of the days to come. So wonderful
to turn back to such moments, in the depths of later time,
looking up at them, as though from shadowed fissures.
How have you fallen here, so barren, stark, and cold,
remote from anyone? But then it was all different –
light and warmth, and that beguiling secrecy
that always attends happiness. Yes, all was different then,
as the two of you huddled underneath
the blanket kept for just those times, the pattern that it had,
blue sailboats against a pure white ground.
Holding it up above your heads, the flashlight there
between you
(which one was holding it?) like a huge erect thing
in the dark, the rudder on a boat, let's say,
you showed each other the cards you liked the most,
each of you drawing one card from the deck, eyes closed,
then peering outside the little tent-like arrangement
only to savor the look and feel of things –
the ring of white candles in the high, wainscoted,
draughty room.
Where had they gone? Yes, adults were far away.
The two of you, the rain outside, the wind,
the flickering and festive light, that was all there was.

It was strange. Yeah he was weird, there's no
question about it.
Well this is what happens. Yep, make your own bed
and lay in it.

Then peeling away the second coat of time,
you run into that person once again, and is it really them?
Would they possibly remember, it's been so long.
They do though, naturally, at least you think they do.
For, true, you never do converse,
don't actually see each other face to face,
you sort of do, but not exactly,
you know the kind of thing I mean,
it's a mood thing more than anything,
kind of an atmosphere, an assemblage you might say.
You have it there between you. Yes, they did

acknowledge –
Did you see that gesture? just that faint, faint smile?
Or perhaps it was that brief look of alarm.
And that was how you knew. Henceforth,
you visit the construction site each evening.
Sometimes you have to wait so long.
The moon is a blue-green puddle of oil
in the black metallic road. Or is that the reflection in
a puddle?

Silvery oil slick of sky, a crane is looming like
a shorn mantis.

There are all these trucks around.
Her face is drained white in the moon.
She gets down on her knees, you didn't ask her to,
but she insists, and she exhibits then her seven
secret wounds:

The first one on the right side near the occiput,
the second on her tongue, the third is purely conceptual

though no less real, the forth is on the inside of her
left eyelid,
the fifth is there, beneath your foot,
(thus comes her posture of abasement,
before the column she desires you to be,
the most high to her own interiority, the obverse
of her own opening and closing nakedness,
(this is her sixth wound)),
the seventh and the last, her pullulating womb,
no longer in her abdomen but hidden like a secret script,
like a phylactery, yet underneath her arm.
She opens up your pants, you make her stand.
For some reason she is crying, no, she will not say why.
And then she does: because of all the animals, she says.
It was this that they were trying to explain,
and yet we haven't learned it, not even just barely learned.
It was this that they were dying for, to pass it on to us,
their agony, their dim complex awareness,
their avowals, their dimensions. So you descend with her
into the mine shaft: the honeycomb
extends outward all around you, upward
far into the heights of depth, downward and down
into unthought-of realms, the agencies
and motivating oracles, heard and yet not seen,
vibrations felt through papery thin walls. There,
in the central courtyard, the ecstatic one
is joined with who must be the other one you knew
way back when you saw his face on that box
of breakfast cereal. It's true, she came to you
in a dream one night, then you slept with her a few times
back in grad school, yes it's really her.
You'd wondered what had happened to her after all.
She got a job out somewhere and then
developed multiple sclerosis in her forties.
Don't you remember? you were on the plane,
going to give your lecture at Bryn Mawr

(Aristotle again?) And it was shortly after you'd received
 the notice of her suicide, yes from what's-his-name.
 Yes that's right. But now she's made of glass.
 Her head is like a hive itself – octagonal shot gun barrels
 stare back from both her eyes, there are
 workers rising and descending, up and up
 and down and down, along her spine.
 Fields of wild clover and alfalfa are her breasts.
 Her abdomen is like a warm haystack.
 Her numerous men, her bachelors,
 are shadows spilling from around her legs like skirts.
 But it was always just before the rain would stop.
 And hidden there still in your private darkness shared
 You'd wonder to each other what makes a human being,
 after all.
 It was not something that you said, you never spoke,
 the girl herself was mute and deathly afraid, for some
 odd reason,
 of the television set. We never had it on much.
 It must have been the way the dark green screen
 reflected her animality back to her,
 as though it were the surface of deep water.
 It is the surface of deep water after all
 that's frightening, and fascinating too. So therefore
 it was just the two of you, the secret friends.
 You'd see her in the mirror there sometimes
 where she had gotten terribly entangled:
 the autism of reflection is a lovely
 and yet a multiplying fate. And that was it,
 that specialness, the tremulous precision
 somewhere in the candlelight, the motioned darkness
 in itself,
 not the eternal darkness, but the motivation for grasping,
 the look, the hand outstretched, the finger tips
 before they touch the waiting skin, which feels
 the touch already

in anticipating it. And so it was she made her presence
a familiar
and yet captivating thing. She was held captive by it too,
her features forming there beneath the coverlet.
It was here the unconditioned
opened up around the human face,
the gaze that watched us in that aureate
and illuminated time –
the clamoring of earliness, even that not yet arrived,
(so heartbreaking to think there really was a time,
a place like that). The Other was the Self,
you knew this then, whatever else you knew;
the other was internal to the self, the inter-voice,
the knowledge of the other was the thing outside,
the passageway, the burnt wick of relation
was the rope you had to climb. The smoke breath
led you up into the opening sublimity,
the infinitely speaking silent, the absolutely silent
spoken still.

Then there was love which never more could cease.
It was then you knew the desolation of humanity,
then in your special irreplaceable dimension,
lost time of youth. Yet do we really need it?
Humanity, that is. Why not pass on to something else?
retaining human form, of course,
(nobody wants to fuck a machine)
but handling it all quite differently. Well first
you've always got to have your credit cards, that's
one thing.

Then another is a really good hair cutter –
irreplaceable, she's worth she's worth she is worth
her weight in gold
I know I'm serious I know but Renee you've got to
get this guy like out of your life ok
Yeah yeah yeah don't yeah me look I'm doing
what I want all right

Don't start talking to me look ma just and if your father
finds out you're seeing one of them look out I'm telling
you the other thing, the second
horizon of the new found world is drugs.

Yes, pharmacology is where it's at. The internet,
that's third.

It'll be passe before too long, of course.

And I really think iambic pentameter is making
a big comeback,

And rhyme also, and plays in verse – forsooth.

(Hey how'm I doin' John? Could you have written that?

I don't think so. And what about that real pretty part
about just starting to get a crush on someone and all that?
You couldn't have done that. Don't fuck me around man,
I'm telling you. (I stole it from Foucault actually.))

Yeah fuck him, he's dead, dead faggot, I hope all
faggots get aids

and fucking die that's what I hope I fucking hate them
I hate them they make me fucking sick I hate the bastards
and these jew bastard doctors fucking making up all

these drugs
and cures and shit just let the fuckers fucking die that's
what I fucking say fuck them

you know tax payer money going to these pansy
ass bastards

running around sticking their dicks in each other left
and right

it's what they fucking deserve.

Then to be lured out by desire, this desire
you feel for another, which throbs in you like a bruise,
the desire for a woman, one woman in particular.

You see her every day, the daily excitement and anxiety,
it seems absurd somehow, and yet how willingly
you submit to it. Still, there is the question,
do you want it really? And always there's a voice
somewhere suggesting an alternative.

I was promised long ago somewhere?
And yet the world can be only what it is.
A morning ritual. The movement of the body
like a diffused pulse, rhythmic, steady, a gathering
of images,
as of a word about to come, or a drop of water hanging
at the faucet's lip.

The organ of utterance is not merely the tongue.
Yet the power of utterance searches outward
to gather around an I, a center. The hand, though,
is strangely separate. My legs feel very distant
as though only the most tenuous thread
connected them with my fixed, searching gaze,
lapsing toward indifference, now and then.
Now the rhythm of the body is a steadier and louder pulse
ascending by way of intervals, each interval
an increase of concentration, a slightly higher pitch.
And her sounds, her breathing, her movements,
just ever so slightly not my own – not my own
by the small interval of absence,
as though my body were held, now,
by the images in the light fanned out across the ceiling
in a scalloped aura tinted by the color of the curtains,
where the intent gaze must seek her,
and where it yet finds nothing. What are you
as you search the rhythms of the passing self,
like a piece of music improvised and listened to
through a wall, your ear placed
to the thin partition of your body
which separates you from yourself, as well
as from the other, as the moment arrives
and light is spoken in its word,
as the word is spoken in its breath, as the gathering
utterance is found, then lost,
spasming and dying in the grasp,
melting to a mere wetness like melting snow?

In the woman you meet in the bar early one evening
you find the repetition of what you had
encountered otherwise,
in waking dreams, and then at night, in sleep,
in fantasy too and yet also in
your philosophical reading. Yes, she has just returned
from a bus trip across the country.
She went to New York City to visit someone –
a minor poet
of whom you've heard but whose work you've never read.
She says that she's in love with him
and yet refuses to talk about her time there.
You realize, after she orders another drink,
that she's completely drunk, and yet
that was the first thing she had said to you,
that she was drunk, so drunk, wasted, she had said.
She is wearing a red dress made of imitation silk,
her body is shapeless, sack-like, inside of it,
and yet her legs are slim and youthful still.
You notice that she smells of sweat;
she asks about the book you're reading
and then seems overjoyed
when you tell her it's philosophy.
She beams, touches your arm and says that she too
has studied philosophy, she writes poetry and offers
to recite one of her poems but then can't remember
more than the first few lines, which are banal.
She says repeatedly that she's so glad to meet you,
touching your arm again each time,
and as she does her gaze meets yours more frequently,
after a few minutes she says
that she would like to have a relationship with you
and asks you to take her back to your apartment.
You realize how true it is, as Lyotard has observed,
that the libido never fails to invest regions,
and not under the rubric of lack and appropriation,

but without reserve. It invests without condition.
For condition is rule and knowledge
and desire knows nothing of rules
and is not concerned with knowledge,
it wants only the object of its desire, unconditionally,
absolutely, and without reserve; history
is meaningless for it, and time is merely the medium
in which it unfolds like a great flower toward its objective,
time is its sunlight and the depths of the self
its fertile darkness, and yet how true it is
that depths are unheard of here, that all
is surface effect. You see this very clearly
amid the erratic gestures and incoherent
wandering observations of an unhinged
and desperate mind, as out of the meandering
gaze there comes forth the laser of desire focused
with strange precision, out of stray disconnected thoughts
and disjointed impulses and blurred, vague memory,
there rises yet this specific injunction – take me, use me.

V

The light's held back in dense striations
behind sand colored plastic blinds. The wooden fan blades
pass around in steady slicings, cutting the
room with shadows.
You'd think by now they would have fallen through,
like everything else here, the walls I guess,
or space, or something, but they haven't. Well my my....
I heard Chet Baker on the radio last night.
I didn't know he sang. I thought it was a woman, actually.
I fall in love too easily. I should know by now.
I think that's what it was. So memorable, beautiful really,
and the finest thing of all was given to me afterwards,
when they said that it was him, and I really could
have sworn
it was a female singer, some sultry dim chanteuse.
And yet it was a man, and this was what was beautiful
about the whole affair – oh, should I call it that?
And I do fall in love too easily myself. There's this
little doll
I see around town all the time. I know she's way too
young for me,
gives me that frightened faun look they sometimes have
when confronted with an older man. I'm really not that old,
but then I guess to her I might...well anyway,
yes that not being able to really tell was it,
that absolute not knowing, that having been mistaken
in such a fundamental way. A woman was a man.
Or was it just a voice there, either way?
Is a voice male or female, when you analyze it?
The invisible infinity, pure light of voice, what
is more perfect,
more at home in being elsewhere, more calling
toward an altered dedication, a new life?

Where there is voice the light fills inward gathered to itself
in presence summoning the powers of the world –
time and passage, truth and its simulacra,
multiplicity and union, which yet is not the simple
or the One, the burning singularity of light
multiplies itself in its simplicity, opening the planes
of space,
the deserts and the mountains, blue rivers and green fields,
of the endless and uncounted, the unforeseeable,
the still unknown – how can we call it earth,
a word too emptied of all meaning –

the-given-by-the-light.

Yet what is given by the light is given by the voice.
It is only in that summoning to cross an emptiness,
the summons to the outside, toward the other,
that light becomes the thing we know as light,
becomes the power of our knowledge, of all
conceivable knowledge, the power of the true and
of the false.

I think I'm going to kill myself after this poem is done.
There's no telling, of course, how long it might go on.
I'm simply not needed in this place. It's really not
a question of time –
the needy, empty time – I really don't believe in that.
But rather one of place. It was only by an historical mistake
I got here after all. An historical mistake
is an irremediable mistake. That means it can't be fixed.
What I'm going to do is travel down to Mexico,
find one of those pharmacies, buy a bunch of pills,
check into a motel
and take a massive overdose. It seem like the best way.
I don't know why everybody doesn't do that.
Unless what I've read on the internet's all fake
about pharmacies
being all open there, just go in and get whatever you want ,
cash and carry, no questions asked. Of course,

if everybody did like that, then what?
 I suppose you have me there, but only by the balls,
 and I don't really need them anyway. But one thing
 I can see
 is where the government (of Mexico, that is) would start
 to get annoyed –
 all these Yankees streaming down to off themselves
 in seedy little rooms in Tijuana or Juarez.
 Maybe I'd pick Cancun (well what the hell).
 The maids would probably revolt,
 having to clean up all that yanqie shit and vomit
 and whatever, but I don't know, they're kind of used to
 all of that,
 in a way, business as usual, I suppose, is how you
 might think of it.
 I was pursuing my own special project though, you see.
 It was the machinic assemblage once again,
avant la lettre, and in my own peculiar way.
 No I didn't get laid that much, that's true,
 but that was actually part of the whole plan,
 if you can believe that. But really I'm serious,
 and everybody has their own peculiarities I guess.
 But then when I had to write my name on all those
 dotted lines
 (I said that once before – sorry) and the libidinal
 economy thing
 began to get – somehow it was really an extreme case
 I guess you'd have to say, as when the light
 is filtered through two panes of glass at once,
 the blinds a kind of armor against further light.
 I was beginning to theorize there'd never be
 an end, an outside to all this, and then one came along,
 and I just simply stopped, but then if you decide
 at some particular point that, yes, you're simply going
 to slide back
 into the darkness you came out of, into the sphere of water,

the enclosed continuum, the walls that rise above
into the daytime sky, dark walls of shadow
structures, even in the middle of the hectic urban day,
will suddenly become a waiting thing, accepting
what you have to offer it, there where the sky
cracks though into the canyons of the lost.
And in the moonlight when you make your way
out of the filmy sack where you had hung
suspended in the branches of a tree, dark eyes
of the forest clustering so near, you see the moonlight
touching the blue clouds like milk poured in a stream.
You feel its tingling presence on your face and hair.
The moth girl meets you in the gateway of the tree,
the night is filled with rivers flowing
and with threads and nets of shadows tackling
the earth, grappling it tight in fractal patterns
on the dust gray street, the fountains are asleep inside
of you,

the wells are listening where your voice calls down,
your tongue descends into the honey's cubicle,
the radiant ringing voices, the shadow workers,
gather themselves around and onto it
like ants adhering to an anteater's tongue.
Your speech is full of secrets of the underworld
from this night forward, and yet, still, everything is known.
You've always sought out insect knowledge
anyway: the beetle's mandible, the spider's creativity,
the aphid's startling leap. Yes, it is yours, the human
is just one thing on the earth. You try to think it
as it might have been. There was a turning and perversion.
Sometime, somewhere. You must have heard reports.
You've seen the evidence, it's somewhere in the suburbs
skimming along the surfaces of night, but then there was
the question of the underground, the voices humming
in the telephone, secret directives given from
electric plugs, the info leaking everywhere. Soon all

is either encrypted or entirely itself or both.
The eels, though, are swarming just behind my face.
I see them when I look into the water on a cloudy day,
the eels are disturbing me inside, they've become part
of me.
I crave the dark, the muddy pools. Where is my flesh
to bite?

The surface of the moon is where the scorpion
has hidden his bright other face, the one he never wears.
Yet in the vertigo of darkness underneath the tree
the underbelly of the scorpion is visible,
the legs move in the wind, the leaves
are aphids sleeping in their lunar baths,
they sometimes fall asleep like that, the blue moles
down underneath among the tree roots let the water out,
it runs down from the cup, the blank sundial
stares into the ticking night, the huge roots of the tree
are like a heart torn open from a chest,
the arteries still beating, root systems throbbing
upward and up into the fountain of tree space.
How to describe the night unless you are part of it,
and yet how to describe it if you are?
The naked body suddenly disrobed
is a startling experience, doubly, triply so
in the darkness of the room. You see her suddenly
against the emptiness, she stands forth from it
in a candor, an ecstatic wondering, which is your
gaze itself.

And yes, you know quite clearly then
it's really only you who feel this way,
which is a strange thing after all, that one should
want the other so much more, devastation, when you
think of it,
never yourself to be desired with that intensity.
So many differences, this difference, echo, in the empty
room,

in the sheer transcendence of alterity which is this space,
the language turning, turning now in its own twilight,
neither a darkness nor a radiance, but a sound,
and, falling in between the syllables,
falling among the empty chains, there is the silence
of your life.

EPILOGUE

The sea is never silent, there are
always sounds...voices, and then there are the islands....
The sea is like a hive of bees, is one
unceasing movement, huge surge and sway of nothing,
bright perishing of bright emptiness reborn –
glittering blue of the water, gold of the sand,
burning glass of sun and sky, and pale white horizon.
The rose of sea foam dissolving into chains of froth.
The sea wind around us, in the bright heat, in the early
part of day,
we went. The sun was high above and hot,
hardly bearable before too long. Glittering blue of the
water; the dark glare.
And very often the sea was painful to look at.
I winced and squinted at the water,
as though into a furnace, my level forearm made a visor,
almost useless though. And some of us went nearly blind;
our eyes were like gray stones. Reddish purple,
brown splotches
were on our necks and faces, on the back sides
of our hands.
These too were from the sun.
The water calm at first, the sun shined down
into the small pond of the sea; the ocean was all still.
The sea was just a small glass bowl.
The sun could shine straight down to the bottom of it.
The shadow of our ship flowed across ribs of sand.
We rowed across molten glass; mirror-like tin flash;
water-sparks leaping from our oars.
In increments, like a tiny water-bug, our one ship crossed
the stillness. There were no ripples where we went;
we made no fissure in the molten glass
and left no mark behind. We rowed until night came,

and then we rowed some more.
My mind was blank that first day and first night.
The angel of self-creation gave me rest.

Night came with flocks of stars low over us
and our minds returned with darkness and with cooler air.
How often I had been out on the open sea before,
yet everything was changed. The stars
were frightening, so many many many –
like tiny lights along some overhanging coast.
I thought of stepping stones
which led beyond the known edge of the world.
The sky so deep and echoing and cavernous and high,
so wide to the black horizons we no longer saw.
We were so utterly alone. I couldn't tell
if I had closed my eyes or had them open still;
I felt that I could lift my hands
and reach to touch each star. One of the men
tried this once, leaving his station in the oars.
The others knocked his balance with their rowing.
He stumbled, fell -- his dark form rearing up
then plopping sideways down like a big sack.
The others laughed; I laughed. But since
he'd only done what I had thought to do,
I couldn't laugh too much. The sea
was like an eye closed on itself in the dark.
And yet once there was a mountain here,
but the deep green hidden somewhere
in the depths of the sky diluted it,
like a tablet lost in water. The purple glacier melted then,
and the ground was left a thin crust
over the blue wells reaching far
down into the magnetized heart
where heaviness evaporates
and lightness grows upward into us
like the sap into the flowering trees,

crystalline demarcations were no longer
seen or felt amid the growing stems
within you, more light and clear than roots, in the water
where you gather luminous transformations,
although softly and in half-forgotten secrecy.
Roots of the birds' song reach so far
into the depths of the morning –
sun-threads; and the print of darkness
fades into an unwritten white radiance. Fathom-suns,
the stars, through the concave glass of dawn
burn through layers of time, and into us,
though only this one, the darkest, breaks through
to these definitive constructions.
In the morning very early, therefore,
or sometimes late at night
after floral explosions and the torch-lit barges
along onyx colored water in the canals
the light has a special glamour, owing
to its scarcity and to its elusive shape.
But even in the middle of the busy urban day
there is a deep and superficial abandonment
to this splendor pouring so freely over us,
a burning book of so many pages
which then seem absolutely blank
except for an infinitesimal script
you never can really decipher, scarcely even see,
the multi-leaved, the silent codex of enigmas,
dim presentiments spread so widely around
that you feel sucked outward like a sponge
into the dry crackings of the world,
the desert of abundance draining you more and more.
And yet is it really enough? And is it really?
(This whispered abroad so often now
and into so many corners of your mind –
that is to say your boredom – as to
become a news story in its own right,

the report of residual enchantment
a merely technical feat in some cases,
an ethical conundrum, or a curiosity perhaps,
in others.)

 This was where the landscape ended
and yet the map continued, creating
a kind of alternative sense organ, a mode
of knowledge incommensurable with the disposition
of the world – or so we came to call it – stray rags
of space, the furniture of day and night,
the light-streaked corridors of deepest dark,
the urban dispensation, long galleries
of meticulous observation, of a lordly and blonde disdain,
(so common) there where the others, the folded ones
have slipped between the parted cracks of draperies,
parting themselves so many times, folding
and refolding, becoming more numerous,
usurping light, allowing just a blade of it
to bisect space-time around the muslin tailor's dummy
in the attic room – dust-light incision
in the sepia dimness, pentecostal mute abandonment
amid dust and silence and forgotten implements,
feathery circumcision revealing not flesh
but only more woven cloth where yet the faces
of the long-sought-for-one rise to the surface
like blood stains through a bandage, teeming
and archaic images, face upon face upon face.
Yet where are these others taking us? And when?
Thus the ochre cube of the paint store in the evening light
with so many bottles smashed in its parking lot
or the yellow structure off to the east just past the airfield
that you notice, quite by chance at take-off
and recognize – somehow, and instantly – as a prison,
just briefly from the window of the plane.
The empty sunlight fills the emptiest places of the city
with a blade-like clarity, with a special sheen

filled with the enigma of time and chance and fate;
emptiest places, yes, and yet not deserted,
for there are others here, and there – perhaps some
follow you
as you walk out further toward the limits of the city,
there by the railroad tracks in the silence and dry heat,
the desert haunted, prairie-scented wind
that feels like a hair drier blowing straight into your face,
where gypsum stones burn with a whitened clarity
and the spilled oil smear is mesmerizing in its
luminous black.
They follow you, it's true, yet still you are quite alone;
the bright sun weighing slowly its pensive thought
of your imminent or eventual effacement,
your shadow, wafer-like then spreading, lengthening
with time,
broken across two glittering hot rails shining blue
in the light
like the wings of horseflies, your shadow-gait unsteady,
interrupted by the wooden ties, an inebriated mathematician
who counts and counts and counts, yet
whose inspiration bends two steel parallels
toward a distant meeting in the immaterial future,
blurred there up ahead with light itself, with
shimmering heat and day.
And yet however far you walk, you always
must return, coming back
toward the stucco cubes, the brick walls edged
with cement –
the sidewalk, as it's called, the traffic flowing past
with its aluminum malevolence and speed,
the goalpost-like sign, the right triangle of steel cable
connecting the Calvary-haunted wounded and hacked
telephone pole to a rectangle of steel plate
set into the tree berm –

curves and triangles of the city streets, the routes
of days and nights.
But none of this can happen without the blackened earth
burnt like a nearly charred potato skin, flaking, warping,
like burnt parchment, like a fragrant newsprint,
the recently exhumed from fire and ash,
marked by the metal grating, an invisible hand,
merely a shadow perhaps, taking it up,
then dropping it. Yet what does it profit a man?

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan. During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object – that is, an experience, a scene, an event. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliché?

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this has a certain political significance, in the sense that then people may think, and then act, differently than they had before. And the results of that are unpredictable.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway – worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself – or with a small amount of help, which I've had – by means of computers, the new printing technology, and of course the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Almost 3,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. And that seemed to me the way to do it.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I'm trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work – Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps you could mention some of your influences.

I would just say that I think the reader will notice echoes of Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, Keats, and others. There's Frost, about whom I wrote a short book, there's Yeats, and in particular Whitman, but also more contemporary people such as Oppen, Elizabeth Bishop, and others. I wrote four books of poems, which I called odes, partly in imitation of Larry Eigner and the French poet Pierre Reverdy. A long poem called *The Second Life of Fire* was influenced by Ashbery, but also by Breton and Heiner Muller. An early long poem called *Second World* was indebted to Blake, Shelley, and Whitman, but also to Robert Duncan, Ginsburg, and Ted Hughes, as well as Hugh MacDiarmid. My work in general seems to occupy an intersection between Surrealism and Romanticism, speaking just very

broadly, a conjunction that many modern poets have worked, but in recent years perhaps rather few, at least in English.

You've written on Frost, isn't that right?

Yes, it was originally my dissertation and then was published by a small Canadian press. I wrote a short book on the American Surrealist Philip Lamantia – I knew him slightly, actually – and then I wrote a book on Elizabeth Bishop which was accepted by Rodopi, but I withdrew it because I wanted to change some things. Health problems and other things intruded. But I hope to resubmit the revised book to them again pretty soon.

As a way to conclude: what are your feelings about living in Taiwan?

I love Taiwan, the place, the people. And the history is very interesting, and also very moving. When I came here, it seemed to me that I had found a place where life was in some ways more natural and where the people were themselves more sensible and sane. But don't tell them that I said that.

Ok. We promise we won't tell anyone.

Ok. Then my secret's safe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STEVEN FRATTALI is an American writer living in Taipei and Boston. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* (ELS, 2002) and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*. (Peter Lang, 2005)

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